

REJOICE IN THE LORD

Philippians 4:1-23

Key Verse: 4:4

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

"Rejoice" is the keynote of Philippians. 4:4 says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" Paul exhorts the Philippians to rejoice always in the Lord. The world is filled with sorrows and miseries, sufferings and agonies. Christians are also human beings. How can we rejoice always? Let's learn from St. Paul about how to rejoice in the Lord.

First, the secrets of rejoicing in the Lord (1-7). Look at verse 1. "Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!" Paul's affection for the Philippian Christians was truly great. He loved them and longed for them. To Paul, the Philippians were his joy and crown. Why did he think so? It was because the Philippians stood firm in gospel faith despite the circumcision party's political pressures and the temptations to practice their faith according to a worldly pattern. In addition to this, the Philippians had world mission vision. When the church was founded by Lydia, from the beginning the Philippians had participated in world mission work by supporting St. Paul. In light of Jesus' life and ministry, the Philippians were exemplary Christians, for they had gospel faith. They were the counterpart of cultural Christians. They stood firm in gospel faith. They participated in world mission work. They looked as if they were a handful of peasants. But they were a mighty army of God. To Paul they were his joy and crown. Paul greatly rejoiced when he saw their gospel faith and world mission vision. We must help sheep to have gospel faith and world mission vision. We also must rejoice when our sheep stand firm in gospel faith and are burning with world mission vision.

Evidently, there were many powerful women in the Philippian church. There was a disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche, which was mentioned in this letter, and this letter was to be read publicly (2).

Paul did not mention who was right or wrong, but encouraged the church leaders to promote reconciliation. Because of their quarreling, the church was in a commotion. Despite this, Paul reminded the Philippians that these women had been gospel soldiers who had once fought at his side in the cause of the gospel. Paul thought that without women of God, the church could not be properly maintained. Paul gave a position of respect to women. Church history proves that women of the church have always been the energy source and prayer nucleus for spiritual revival.

In verses 4-7, Paul tells them of the secrets of rejoicing in the Lord. Look at verse 4. "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" Rejoicing is the keynote of this book. Worldly people rejoice when they feel happy and they are angry and upset when things are not going as well as they had expected. But Christians must rejoice always, under all kinds of circumstances.

How can we rejoice in the Lord always? We can rejoice when we do something pleasing to God. Paul said in verse 5, "Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near." We must prove ourselves as ones who know the grace of Jesus, and we must be kind to others as if we were doing it in the presence of Christ Jesus. In the New Testament the whole period from Christ's coming to the consummation of the kingdom is viewed as the last times (1 Jn 2:18). From God's vantage point of view, a thousand years are as a day. There is a sense in which, for every generation, Christ's coming is near. This is the view of his coming which our forefathers of faith had. It must be ours also. With this view in our hearts, we must live as gentle Christians.

Gentleness is Christlike consideration for others. One day Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and invited them, humbly bowing low to the ground. When he brought them into his tent, he gave them water to wash their feet. He refreshed them with bread and with steak cooked from a choice and tender calf. Abraham did this unwittingly, only later did he realize that his guests were the angels of God. One Sunday morning one of our High School Bible Fellowship members disappeared from his home. As soon as

Missionary David Choi was informed of this news, he said to his wife, "I must quit my school studies and search for him." His gentleness was evident to all of us.

Our Lord Jesus' gentleness is the most evident to all human beings. Jesus was gentle to a despicable tax collector. Jesus was gentle to the Samaritan woman who had had five husbands. Jesus was gentle to his disciples who were slow to learn and eager to eat. Once Jesus and his disciples went on a retreat to a quiet place. At that time, 5,000 people gathered around him. It was hard for Jesus to be gentle to all of the 5,000 people. But he was gentle and humbly served them to the end. As the children of God, we must let our gentleness be evident to all who are weary and tired so that they can take rest through us and so that we can please God.

Look at verse 6. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." In order to rejoice in the Lord, we must overcome our anxiety. When one wants to take care of himself without trusting in God, he becomes anxious. When one's heart is inclined toward material pursuits, he becomes anxious. Anxiety is the pagan's general social climate. Jesus said to his disciples in Matthew 6:25, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?" Again in verse 34 he said, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

What can Christians do not to worry? Look at verse 6 again. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." We can pray to God. Prayer is the expression of our faith. When we have to worry about something, we must pray to God instead of worrying.

We remember in American history that there were many prayer servants. During the first part of the Revolutionary War, General George Washington's army lost a battle at Germantown. Then they had to confront another battle at Valley Forge: It was the cold, cold winter of

1777. The number of wounded soldiers increased day by day. Food, medicine, clothing and ammunition were insufficient. General Washington was in a discouraging situation. But he did not give up. He prayed earnestly to God. As a result, the war situation turned in favor of his army for national independence.

In 1787, representatives of the thirteen states met as the drafting committee for the Constitution. The meeting came to a deadlock because of their differences of opinion and lack of mutual understanding. At that time, at the proposal of Benjamin Franklin, they had a special prayer meeting. As a result, the American Constitution was born. In 1863 during the month of July, the Gettysburg battle was a wretched and appalling sight. At that time, General Dan Sickles saw that President Abraham Lincoln knelt down and prayed all night with a loud voice.

When we are anxious, evil spirits come into our hearts and make us worry more and more until we become paralyzed by fear. On the other hand, when we pray, the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts and drives out all our sinful thinking and feelings. He fills us with new strength and new faith. When we pray, we can experience the peace of God. Look at verse 7. "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." God hears our prayers and gives us peace that passes all understanding and guards our minds and hearts from the spirit of the world, so that we may not be anxious.

Second, think about something excellent and praiseworthy (8,9). Look at verse 8. "Finally, brothers, 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." Paul understood that one's thoughts direct one's life. So he exhorted the Philippian Christians to think about something excellent or praiseworthy. Paul did not say directly what these are. But we can see clearly that they are things above and that they are something about Christ Jesus.

"Whatever is true...." In this relativistic world, the conception of truth or falsity is ambiguous to most young people. Dr. Lee met a young

lady in 1975 at the Niagara Falls UBF Summer Conference. He met her again in 1976 in Germany at the UBF conference there. At that time, she said, "I have a boyfriend. I am going to marry him right after college graduation." One day in 1980 Dr. Lee was surprised to see her at the Chicago center. He asked, "Didn't you marry yet?" She said, "No." "Why not?" he asked. She answered, "He left me and married another girl." Dr. Lee was infuriated by the fact that her boyfriend used her for four years and then abandoned her. So he said, "How could he abandon you after using you for the last four years?" She said, "No, he did not use me; we enjoyed each other mutually." Her way of thinking was quite relativistic. She did not know the truth of God at all. We hoped that she would study the Bible so that she might somehow come to know the truth of God. But when she recovered emotionally, she was gone.

Let's think about "whatever is noble." These days, the conception of nobility seems to have disappeared completely. Practicality seems to wield its power. There is a tendency that many girls want a football player or a rock star as their boyfriend. There is an impression that many girls are enslaved by the cursed desire for a husband (Gen 3:16). Because of this cursed desire, many of them fail to keep themselves noble and pure. We must remember that God gave each person noble desire. Because of this noble desire, whenever we think about a selfish man or a corrupted woman, we are disgusted. On the other hand, when we think about pure and sacrificial Mary, the mother of Jesus, we are moved to tears and wish that all the women of the world would be like her. Whenever we think about Joseph, whose gentleness was evident to his fiancée, though she had become pregnant by the Holy Spirit before marriage, we feel noble and we want to be like Joseph, a compassionate father to Mary.

When Dr. Lee was a boy, he saw a friend of his bow his head to the floor of his room under a picture of Dr. Albert Schweitzer. So he asked him why he did so. His friend said, "I want to be a great man like him. I want to be a philosopher, theologian, musician, medical doctor and missionary like him." Why did Dr. Schweitzer become the object of admiration to so many young people in time past and present? Why did even Communists esteem him with high honor when he died? It was because he was a noble man with noble desire. When he was young, he

resolved to study hard until the age of 30, and then serve the flock of God for the remaining 30 years of his life. By God's grace he actualized his idealism. When he had a noble desire, he became a noble man.

"Whatever is pure..." Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (Mt 5:8). Jesus wants all of us to be pure virgin brides toward him. We know that a woman's best virtue is purity. Third, the secret of being content in all circumstances (10-23). When Paul received some financial support from the Philippians again after a long interval, he expressed his thanks to them (14-23). He also talked about how he spent his life in prison. What did he talk about? Did he talk about all the discomforts and inconveniences? No! He said, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." What a great man Paul was! When we read through the Bible, we learn the general tendency of human beings. Most people are familiar with suffering. In times of suffering they live humbly before God. But in times of prosperity many people become lazy, proud and worthless to God because of their corruption. Paul had learned to be content whatever the circumstances. Look at verse 12. "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."

What was his secret to overcome himself in all circumstances? What was his secret to stand aloof from all hardships? What was his secret to endure all his sufferings in prison? Look at verse 13. "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." It was Jesus who gave him strength to do everything.

Here we learn that Paul depended on Jesus when he was hungry and when he was in plenty. Paul was confronted with pain and sorrow, but he depended on Jesus to overcome his pain and sorrow. His faith in Jesus made it possible for him to overcome himself and live a victorious life in all areas of his life. What a great man Paul was! He had perfect balance and harmony in his inner man. Here we learn that the life of faith leads us to a victorious life. Here we learn that faith is not a theological argument, but life itself in Jesus. Here we learn that faith is victory. Here we learn that faith is everything. Here we learn that our

circumstances cannot be a problem to us at all; the real problem is our faith problem.

Let's pray that God may teach us how to rejoice in the Lord always and how to think of something excellent and praiseworthy. Let's pray that God may teach us how to be content whatever the circumstances so that we can be useful to God. Praise God that he does not want us to remain as weaklings or cowards, but wants us to be strong in his grace.