

Rejoice in the Lord Always

Kenneth Korby

Philippians 4:4–7

Sorrow and Joy Intermingled

Friday, one of the most noble Christian women I have ever known died. Her name was Jessie Hayes. She was a friend of mine. I was her pastor.

A young woman of 17, she had contracted multiple sclerosis. She had borne two sons, Charles and Alan, both talented musicians, and godly men. The man she married left her when she got multiple sclerosis. I watched her deteriorate level by level, plane by plane. I never heard her sing, but they said she had a beautiful soprano voice. [unclear] of quietness and joy and steadfastness she has had few equals among those that I have cared for, including me; I'm no equal to her. And her sons cared for her. In the years that I was their pastor I never heard them complain once. She got to the point where we even had to hold a cigarette for her to smoke. She could not hold; she could still draw. Now I take it that Jessie will sing like they say she used to.

I wanted you to know about Jessie, because today we're going to talk about joy in the Lord, rejoicing in Him. Jessie was one of those women, those sick Christians, whom people went to visit in order to be strengthened by her, even though she could no longer do the simplest thing for herself.

Same time we have a time of joy today. Debbie Zimmerman has earned her Baccalaureate degree. She will be graduated this afternoon.

It often goes like this, that there is sorrow and grief and joy intermingled. I say this also to remind you we're going to be talking about rejoicing in the Lord. You won't have the foggiest notion about that rejoicing if you know neither grief nor great gladness.

Announcements

Now, on a slightly different level, the offering envelopes for 1993 are here; please pick them up. And I am under solemn obligation to tell you: pick them up, but do not use them until 1993.

Did I get it right, Bertha? Good for you. Good for me.

Also, the portals of prayer are there for you to pick up. Those of you who need the large print, there are some there, because some of you prefer to have that for your reading.

Invocation and Text

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, my dearly beloved brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ, the peace of the Lord be with all of you.

Since Paul said, “I’m going to have to say it again, rejoice in the Lord,” and I think I better say it again, I’ve decided I’m going to read the text again to follow Paul’s example.

Philippians chapter 4, verses 4 through 7: “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand; have no anxiety 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 passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Why Paul Says It Again

Paul knew God and he knew Paul, and therefore Paul knows me. And you can trust that he knows you. When he says, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Well, I’d better say that again: rejoice,” he knew what he was talking about. Because our language, in our life, in our world, much of the time, calls for God to say over and over to us, “Rejoice in the Lord.”

First, our language is full of jangling and jawboning and quarreling. We’re always arguing for our right as opposed to the obvious wrong of the other ones. Our opinions and our territory, our desires and our goals, they are preeminent, and there’s a great deal of quibbling. Like Paul said to the Galatians, “You chew on each other like dogs.” You will devour each other.”” And the Psalm says the dogs have chewed on us, and they prowl the streets of the city day and night until they get what they want.

So there is, in our language, a call for us Christians to wake up and to say, “Rejoice in the Lord always; rejoice in the Lord.”

A second time it has to be said, because we look for joy everywhere else. If we can just find something that will give us enjoyment, we think that entertainment and fun are about the

same as joy. That is why Christians need to hear the word “Rejoice in the Lord,” because entertainment and having fun and feeling good are not what joy is about, so that our language and our circumstances call for us to hear the word of the Lord, “Rejoice in the Lord always.”

Let me say that to you again: rejoice.

Mary’s Joy in God Her Savior

For the Lord Jesus Christ was not formed in the womb of the Blessed Virgin by some way that she figured out to inseminate herself or to grab some man and say, “You are the one that I choose.” It happened by the word of God in her ear when the Holy Spirit did what he said, and the joy of Mary magnifying the Lord was that what his word had said was accomplished in her.

There were, no doubt, certain kinds of problems for her. How was she going to tell Joseph? How was she going to tell her father? How was she going to tell her mother? How was she going to tell her pastor? What would she say to the other teenagers in the town?

All of those problems surrounded her, but she was the one who was the beggar to whom good had been done and for whom good was done. And so she says, “My soul magnifies the Lord. My joy is in God, my Savior.”

Let Your Forbearance Be Known

Rejoice in the Lord. Again I will say, rejoice. Let your forbearance be known to all men.

I have counted there are 17 different ways in the English language that translators have tried to translate that word of Paul, which is forbearance. You who remember the King James will remember the word moderation. Let your moderation, your forbearance be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.

Joy in the Lord arises from the Lord. For this Lord who is at hand, the one who is coming, is the root of everything that Paul means by that word forbearance. It means a gentleness. It means a meekness. It means moderation. It means that when you are in charge, you use some equity and tenderness with those with whom you deal. It means a courtesy.

The mother of the Lord running to Elizabeth, the old woman, when we would have thought, well, she will sit on her throne, have her crown, and the whole world will come running to

Mary. That is the way it is pictured now by some of the churches, but that's not the way Mary did it. She ran off to the mountains to see Elizabeth, and Elizabeth, the gracious old woman, [unclear] to Mary, "How is it that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

That is what Paul means by that word forbearance, moderation, gentleness, courtesy, patience.

It is a kind of ruling word, that people can become so right that they become wrong by how right they are. [unclear] had some (you've lived it, you've lived with me at least) in argument, in mental attitude, cast of mind, opinion about others, opinion about the times: we become so right that our right becomes wrong. God is [unclear] that way.

The Lord Is at Hand

So the Lord is at hand. That is how you let your forbearance, your moderation, be known.

His will toward us on the one side is an absolute demand. There is no equivocation in what God demands. There is no slippage. You do it and live, or you don't do it, and you die. There is no slippage, and you know that.

You have confessed with me this morning that before him we have lost our rights. Before him we have earned our debt and torment. And it is that debt and torment that troubled us. By the wrath, your wrath, we are troubled. Our days are troubled. We work and work and work, and it seems that it all ends up just dribbling away.

And because of that restless torment, we jangle and quarrel and quibble and jawbone and fight and push each other by all the harshness of our rightness. Oh, that is the opposite of let your forbearance be known.

For his will toward us is a will of kindness. We said it here this morning. We confess what we are, and then we stuck our "but" into the middle of it: "But have mercy on us."

Mercy, clemency, kindness, tenderness, out of the heart of God. And how does that come? The Lord is at hand. That comes with this man, Jesus Christ, our Lord, the one formed in Mary, not by man, not by the will of Mary, not by hocus pocus, but by the word of promise in her ear, and by the power of the Holy Spirit in that word. Well, that is the word that he gives to you.

In this man God has made peace between us and among us. He has made a righteousness not demanded, but given to beggars. "Stir up your might, O Lord," we beg you (beggars beg), "and

come, that by the might of your mercy we may be delivered from those things which our sins hinder.” And his will toward us is to do that for us.

He is not a sky god floating around so that you have to shoot a theological rocket to find him. He is the one who comes at hand. [unclear] it said, Isaiah said, he made bare his arm; he rolled up his sleeve. The name of that sleeve is Jesus, born of Mary. That’s how close he is to hand: his hand to us as close as your hand is to you. So let your forbearance be known, your clemency, your gentleness, your patience of mind, that we are not always sighing in exasperation about each other, but that we are steady in quiet. That comes from him: the Lord is at hand.

Have No Anxiety: Pray

And so Paul says, “I want you to be anxious about nothing, nothing. Be anxious about nothing.”

Well, yeah, that’s alright for Paul. He doesn’t live in our world. It’s alright for Paul. I don’t know why it’s alright for Paul. He had to earn his living, too. He was, like Jesus, greatly abused, despised, laughed at, called a fool, called a liar and false prophet, but he said, “Have anxiety about nothing.”

So maybe we ought not to simply fluff Paul off and say, well, that’s all right, but we’re living in modern times. You can’t do that.

Now, maybe we ought to pay attention, for just as his formula for joy is the Lord, who is clemency, meek, gentle, and of good will to us. So his formula for anxiety is the life of prayer. You say to this God from your heart what this God has said he wants for you, so that he gives Himself to you, and He says, “Desire me.”

“Jesu, joy of my desire.” Jesu is my gift to you. Our joy in the Lord is learning to desire Him.

So pray. Don’t worry. Pray.

Let the worry, the anxiety, and you have plenty of them, most of us do. Let it be a spring, an engine, a diving board, to turn you loose at praying, to dive into His promises, to have a motor running on His words, pray.

Prayer Begins by Listening

The first thing you do when you pray is shut up, [unclear]. It is a conversation, and if you have any courtesy about you at all, you will listen to the Lord first. "Listen, I have something to tell you," so that you know what is on his mind to do for you, to bless you, to give you.

And then comes the terror. Then God says, "Now you talk; I will listen." That is the way it is in a conversation. One talks, the other listens, and then the talker becomes the listener, and the listener becomes the talker.

Our problem is that we don't know how to pray because we don't know how to listen. Blessed Mary did not get pregnant by a man. Blessed Mary was pregnant by a word of God to her, and that is why we call her blessed. [unclear] is she who believed that what was spoken to her is done.

So that is the way it is with prayer. We learn to talk by listening. One of the reasons we haven't learned to talk is we don't know how to listen.

One of the side effects of private confessions is that you get listened to in a way that you've never been listened to on earth. Somebody will just listen to you, listen to you for your advantage, not against you, but for you.

Prayer, prayer, that conversation, where we listen to what God gives, wants, promises, and we learn from that how to respond to Him, to say, "Hallowed be your name." "My name is your light." "Hallow your name in us." "My kingdom is your salvation." "Your kingdom come." "My will is your eternal good." "Your will be done."

Supplication: "But, Mama, You Promised"

That is how we learn to pray, and we do it with supplication. Take a promise of God and press it to Him. Press it on Him: "For your name's sake, O Lord, forgive my iniquity, because it is very great." For He has exalted His name and His word above all things.

The supplication is to take that name and stick it to God, to stick to him like cockleburs stick to a dog's fur. It's like your child saying in the dime store, "But, Mama, you promised." What can you do when you're stuck on your own promise?

Well, God is not so high-minded that He says, "Well, the last time I gave you something you didn't do very well with it, so I think I'll just keep it back for a while." God has forbearance,

clemency, courtesy, meekness, gentleness, patience with us. He knows what we are and still has mercy on us.

Supplication is to urge that upon God, to urge what He has promised to give, to urge upon God. “My children are baptized in your name. Now take care of your property. You are a father who is good. Take care of your children.”

That is to supplicate, to urge upon God, and give him no rest day or night.

With Thanksgiving

That’s why supplication is with thanksgiving. Thanksgiving has nothing to do with feeling thankful. Thanksgiving has everything to do with proclaiming the work, the steadfastness, the love, and the mercy of God toward you.

Thanksgiving is as we do in this holy meal. Eating and drinking, proclaiming his death till he comes. Everything may make you thankful by the time you are through. It may arise out of your feeling of gratitude.

But whether you feel or do not feel gratitude is beside the point. Thanksgiving has to do with the word of God seized in the heart and repeated and proclaimed and sung.

Joy Is Seen in Peripheral Vision

So “Rejoice in the Lord always; let me say it again, rejoice” feeds itself on this work by which God has made everything right with us. Joy is not something you look for. If you’re looking for joy, you will get what you’re looking for. It won’t be joy.

Joy is seen in peripheral vision. You’re listening to a word, you’re singing a word, you’re believing, you’re hearing, you are praising, and joy means God has made things right with you, and him, and us.

Name Your Petition: Bread

So let your prayers, your requests, your petitions be made known: [unclear] prayer, supplication with thanksgiving, and your petition. Say it, name it; say it, name it. Do not dance around God with some highfalutin talk. What you are worried about is money for your taxes? Then say it.

It was he who taught you to pray, “Give us today our bread for today.” I didn’t make that up. You didn’t. The church didn’t. The high god, the one who was at hand, made it up.

Bread. Husbands, wives, parents, children, food, money, weather, heat, taxes, schooling, troubles. Bread. The stuff we live on.

Because that’s what we are anxious about. The stuff we live on. “[unclear] have anxiety about anything,” says the apostle; rather, pray, with supplication, with thanksgiving; let your requests be made known to God.

The Peace That Passes Understanding

The peace of God will guard and keep you. This is the peace that passes understanding. [unclear] ago, the rabbi taught people how to get peace of mind. The great Jesuit Fulton J. Sheen did him better. He wrote a book on how to get peace of soul.

And now you can buy them by the hundreds. Little how—to things that will give you peace. And some of them work. And I’m sure that somebody finds all of them to work.

That is a peace which you can understand. You can find out what to do, work it, and when you work it, it works. But that’s not what Paul is talking about.

He’s talking about the peace of God which God sends like a marine guard, standing at the door of your heart to keep watch over you, to keep watch over you as Mary was kept watch over. In the silence of those nine months, between the parenthesis of the child coming and the birth, in the silence of those nine months, that is where the Lord Christ was formed in her, to be born, to leap down from his royal throne, and to come among us.

The way she was preserved in that carrying him is the way the peace preserves you. The peace of God stands guard over you to keep your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus.

A People of Joy

If we were to ask what kind of a people would we like to be, many of us I think would have many different answers. And I don’t know whether my saying this is my deepest desire or not. I will have to let God judge that. But to me, it would be a very precious gift if this little congregation and her pastor were known in this place, among the Christians and among the

non-Christians, as the people of joy. The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus for life everlasting.

SOURCE

Kenneth F. Korby · Fourth Sunday in Advent [December 1992, inferred] · Philippians 4:4–7

Transcribed from an audio recording of a sermon by Kenneth F. Korby (CTSFW Media). [unclear] marks words that could not be made out, and a few short passages may be missing.

The recording carries no date. The occasion is inferred from the sermon itself: the Advent collect ("Stir up your might, O Lord"), the Philippians 4 epistle, and the announcement that the 1993 offering envelopes are ready point to the Fourth Sunday in Advent, December 1992. The opening section is the pastor's announcements before the sermon proper.