

Sermon Text: Philippians 4:4-7 ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. ⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (NKJV)

Sermon Theme: The Christmas Gift of God that Keeps on Giving Joy

In the name of the Christ Child dear fellow redeemed;

In the many Christmas hymns, carols, and songs we sing this time of year there is a recurring thought that is expressed, namely, we have reason to sing for joy. Listen to some of the opening phrases in the following Christmas hymns: “Come rejoicing, praises voicing, Christmas Day is breaking,” “Joy to the world,” “Rejoice, rejoice, this happy morn,” and “Now sing we, now rejoice,” Again and again the hymn writers remind us that we have reason to rejoice with joy this season of the year. To this our Scripture text today adds that we always have reason to be joyful.

Many celebrants agree we have reason to be joyful at Christmas time. But for many, the idea to be joyful in any and every situation sounds rather fanciful and even impossible. People have said there is joy at Christmas time provided workers can have time off to celebrate and families can get together for the holidays and if there are some decorations to adorn the house and presents to be given and received, and also if there are special foods and drink to consume.

But then, these same individuals may question how a person could be joyful other times of the year, like after the holidays when a person has to face the many problems of daily living, such as, going back to the salt minds to work, taking down the decorations, paying the Christmas bills, trying to lose excess weight gained over the holidays, the encounter with unkind people, sicknesses, accidents, and tragedies.

The reason why many fail to see how a person can have reason for joy even during the trials of life is because very often they fail to recognize the ultimate and primary reason for joy at Christmas time. I would also venture to say that while we know the reason for Christmas joy, still there are times when problems touch our lives, we lose sight of reasons to have joy in the midst of trials.

What is the basis for this seemingly fanciful notion that we can experience joy in any and every situation through out our lives? It is found in the joyous message an angel of the Lord made known to the shepherds on the hillside outside of Bethlehem so many years ago, saying, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Lk. 2:10,11) We are reminded here that the ground for perpetual joy is to be found in the Christ Child. This message comes across to us when we sing on in those Christmas hymns that exhort us to rejoice with joy in our hearts. We sing, “All

my heart this night rejoices as I hear far and near sweetest angel voices. ‘Christ is born,’ their choirs are singing,” “Joy to the world, the Lord is come!” and “Rejoice, rejoice, this happy morn, a Savior unto us is born, the Christ, the Lord of Glory.”

Whether or not there is vacation time off or relatives to get together with or decorations or presents or Christmas dinners at this season of the year, the reason we find reason to rejoice with joy is because of the wonderful event of the Savior of the world being born. We are also reminded by the apostle Paul in today’s text that it is because of the coming of the Lord and His redemptive work as our Savior that we can find cause to always rejoice with joy, no matter what kind of conditions of life we encounter.

Some time back there was an advertisement leading up to the Christmas holiday that said, “Give the gift that keeps on giving.” In the case of the heavenly Father sending His beloved Son to earth as our Savior and blessing us with faith to believe in Him, we have received a priceless Christmas gift from God that keeps on giving us joy every day of our lives.

When the apostle exhorted the Philippians to “Rejoice in the Lord always,” they were to understand this exhortation to include those times of difficult trials, tribulations, and afflictions. Knowing Paul’s personal experiences, they knew he was not just talking the talk, but he was also walking the walk of a joyful Christian. It was on Paul’s first missionary trip to Philippi that he was beaten and thrown into prison on account of his gospel ministry. That night Paul could be heard in prison praying and singing joyful songs of praise to the Lord. What could he possibly find reason for joy during this time of tribulation? It was the thought of His Savior that caused him to be joyful. Being mindful of Jesus having lovingly given Himself and willingly suffered so much for Paul’s eternal redemption, Paul in turn was glad for the opportunity to show his love and thankfulness to Jesus by suffering for His name’s sake, for His kingdom and for His glorious cause. The very letter Paul sent to the Philippians was written while he was in chains, being imprisoned in Rome.

In the face of trials of life, Paul’s epistle to the Philippians is filled with expressions of joy in the Lord. At the very beginning of the letter, Paul expresses his joy and thankfulness for the Christian fellowship of the Philippians that the Lord had blessed him with—how that the Philippians out of faith and love for their Savior had generously supported Paul and his ministry with their prayers and gifts, and sent Ephaphroditus to care for him while Paul was in prison.

Since our heavenly Father ever loves us and treats us according to His divine wisdom and His abundant grace for Jesus’ sake, we rejoice in knowing that whatever He sends or permits to come our way will in some way serve to bless us. In the epistle of James we find this exhortation, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” (1:2-4)

Through our Savior’s gracious word and His abiding presence in our lives we are able to find joy in the midst of sorrows, as He comforts, strengthens, and uplifts our grieving spirits and gives us reason for hope. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians “Blessed be the

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” (1:3-4)

An example of this is when we suffer the loss of a loved one who died in the Lord, we are able to rejoice and comfort one another with the wonderful message that that loved one is even now with the Lord in heaven, because of the Savior’s redemptive work. And we in turn find certain hope in the blessed knowledge we will join all the saints of heaven, because of our eternal salvation in Christ Jesus.

In the earthly realm, there are many things that would rob us of joy. Some of those robbers of joy include the feelings of fear, worry, and anxiety. Whenever we fix our attention solely on the storms of life with the foreboding prospect of danger, troubles, sickness, and lack without having in view our gracious Lord, our spirits are vexed by anxious moments of fretfulness and dread concerning our welfare or that of others.

Since we are susceptible to such woeful feelings, the word of God would drive out those anxious feelings and replace them with feelings of joy as we hear Paul saying to us, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” With this, Paul reminds we never have reason to worry about anything. Why? It is because of Jesus who came to earth as our Savior. Because Jesus redeemed us unto God, we have a gracious Father in heaven who is ever watching over us, tending to all our needs, wants, and cares.

Because Jesus purchased and won for us the gracious favor of God by His life, death, and resurrection, whenever we are faced with any kind of trouble or difficulty, we can bring the matter to the Lord in prayer and know God will do whatever is necessary, helpful and wise to remedy the situation. In the book of Psalms the Lord says to us, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will glorify Me.” (50:15)

Another baneful condition of life that can rob us of joy is the lack of inner peace and peace with God. When our consciences are plagued with guilt over sin and racked with fear over God’s righteous wrath, our spirits are deprived of peace and joy of heart.

The answer to a guilty conscience was voiced by the Christmas angels who praised God concerning the birth of our Savior, saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Lk.2:14) This heavenly choir sang of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ who blesses us with a peace which the world cannot give, a peace and joy of heart in the knowledge of sins forgiven and of God’s goodwill toward us through Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul writes of God’s peacemaking work in Christ Jesus, declaring, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them.” God made peace with us through our Savior by not charging us with our sins. That peace is experienced by us when we accept in faith Jesus’ work of salvation. There is no greater peace than to know that no sin in us can separate us from God, from His kingdom of grace here on earth and from His kingdom of glory in heaven. We possess this peace and joy, because our Savior Jesus removed all our sins and our deserved punishment through His redemptive work.

Paul says of this precious gift of peace that “the peace of God, which surpasses all

understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” This peace of God in Christ Jesus which transcends all understanding is like a sentry standing guard over our hearts and thoughts lest we be troubled or distressed. This peace keeps our hearts from being tormented and overwhelmed by sin. In our Savior Jesus we not only have peace of heart, but also joy in the knowledge of our salvation.

Because of Jesus and all He has done for us as our Savior, we most certainly can find reason for joy in any and every situation of life.

May the knowledge of our Savior God’s loving care for our souls and our earthly welfare always fill our hearts with joy. Truly He is a never ending source of great joy and gladness to all those who look to Him in faith. Amen.