

REJOICING IN A WORLD OF WORRY

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” When you read this statement, what sort of thoughts and ideas go through your mind? Personally speaking, only good thoughts tend to go through mine. When my wife and I got married, that was a time to rejoice. When both of my daughters were born, that was a time to rejoice. When good friends of mine that I had been praying for came to know Christ as their Lord and Savior, that was a time to rejoice. It is in those times that rejoicing seems to come so naturally. Is that what the apostle Paul was talking about in this passage though? Was he commanding that Christians rejoice in the good times and only in the good times?

The context surrounding this verse does not give us any indication that Paul was talking about rejoicing in the good times. As a matter of fact, the context gives a very strong argument that Paul was talking about rejoicing at a time when that is the last thing that they would have wanted to do. For starters, their leader, Paul, was in jail when he was supposed to have been talking with them in person. Pastor Kennedy has been out for two weeks with a bum knee. Imagine if he were in jail for an unknown period of time for doing nothing other than preaching the gospel. How would you feel? There were also some conflicts starting to erupt within the church. Small disagreements can cause huge factions and splits. Imagine how you would feel if your leader were gone and the church was starting to split. To say the least, worry was a big part of what the church was going through; worry about Paul, worry about the unity of the church, and so on. Through all of this, from his jail cell, Paul commanded that they rejoice.

So what was Paul talking about? How do you make yourself rejoice when the world around you is not going the way that you intended? When teenagers do not follow in the path that you started them on, when a spouse is becoming more and more distant and divorce is looming on the horizon, when you go to the ATM only to find out that your account has been overdrawn, when the doctor calls and says that the news is not so good, in those times of worry, how do you rejoice? *One thing that Christians can know for sure is that if God requires it by commanding it, then He will equip us with what we need to fulfill it.*

The sermon this weekend deals with rejoicing in and amongst worry. You can't control the circumstances, you can't control other people in what they say and do, but you can control your reaction. Paul commanded in I Corinthians 10:31 to glorify God in whatever you do. The message this weekend is intended to teach you what God wants you to do in the face of worry. Spend a few moments before the message preparing your heart for worship and remember: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

Working Out Your Salvation...

Monday and Tuesday: Philippians 4:6-7

Moving from Praying to Correct Praying:

What do you generally pray about when you are placed into a situation that causes you to worry? Most people tend to pray about the big problem that is causing them to worry, and the prayer is pretty universal, "God, please make this problem/situation go away?" James 4:1-10 talks about asking with the wrong motives. While that passage is not specifically talking about asking for worry to go away, it is pretty clear that when we pray for things with a selfish motive, God will not answer those requests. Remember that praying for God to remove something isn't bad, it is when you give God the "Do this or else" treatment that it becomes bad.

Go to Matthew 26:39 and 42 to see how Jesus handled probably the most worrisome situation that any human has ever had to face. He knew that he was about to be crucified, He knew that He was going to have the God turn His back on Him for sins that He didn't commit, and He knew that He was going to have to endure God's Wrath for those sins. This is a situation that would instantly produce worry, anxiety, fear, panic, and a whole host of other emotions. What was His response?

In Philippians 4:6-7, Paul gives a recipe for correct godly prayer that God will hear and answer because it is given with the right motives. It involves thanksgiving, talking, and taking confidence. The goal of the next two days is to allow you to understand these three areas so that you can start to make them a daily habit in your lives:

1. Thanksgiving to God and for His provisions:
 - What has God given you? (Salvation, a relationship with Him, and eternal life are all things that should excite you. If they don't then there is some repentance and confession that needs to happen.)
 - How has God provided for you? (Think about all of the blessings that He has given to you. Most of what we have is not needs, but wants. Make a list of all that you have been blessed with.)
 - What sins has God kept you from? (What prayer requests have you made that God did not answer? Thank Him for that)
2. Talking to God about your needs and problems:
 - Be Specific
 - Be Repetitious
 - Be Moldable

3. Taking confidence in God's concern for you and His ability to meet your needs:
- This is active not passive, i.e. it's a choice not a feeling.
 - This means you keep doing what God wants regardless of how you feel!
 - You will have to choose to not go down the worry path.
 - Tomorrows' homework will help with that.

Wednesday and Thursday: Philippians 4:8

Moving from Thinking to Correct Thinking:

What do you typically think about when you are worried? If you are like most people, you will tend to think about the problem that is causing you to worry. If you were told not to think about a pink elephant, guess what you would probably think about instantaneously...A Huge Pink Elephant. Your goal for the next two days is to make a list of items that you can begin to think about when worry rears its' ugly head. Take your time in doing this. It will be of no help to you when worry comes if you don't do a good job before hand. Under each heading make a list of at least 15 items.

- What is True? (This is not something that you want to be true; rather it is something that is absolutely true. Romans 8:38-39 says that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. That is true!)
- What is Honorable? (The idea behind this word is that which is grand or impressive. The character of God is something that would be great to focus on here. Go to the book of Psalms and learn about the grand magnificent character of God.)
- What is Right? (The idea to keep in mind here is that of doing what God has commanded. Whatever God has commanded you to do is what is right. Matthew 22:37-40, Ephesians 4:25-32, and Galatians 5:22-23 are great passages to go to in order to find out what is right)
- What is Pure? (This term has as its' main idea immaculately clean or free from impurities. Think on whatever is pure and clean. You can only find these items in the Bible, as the world has tainted everything. A great example of this would be Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. Go to Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, and/ or John 19 to think about the pure sacrifice of Christ.)
- What is Lovely? (This word means "acceptable and pleasing" to God. What things are acceptable and pleasing to God? Check out 1 Samuel 15:22, Colossians 1:10, Colossians 3:20 for a few hints on what pleases God.)
- What is of good repute? (Literally "good repute" means "Speaking words of good omen". In other words, don't focus on the negative; rather focus on the blessings of God. What has God blessed you with? What has God done in your life? Where has God brought you? This is not simply positive thinking; this is merely reminding you of what God has done.)
- What is excellent? (In other words, what is worthy of you thinking after, allowing your feelings to go toward, and allowing your actions mirror? 1 Peter 1:15, 16 and Philippians 2:3-11 are great places to go in order to find answers to this question.)

- What is worthy of praise? (To say it another way, “What is worthy of our worship? God is the only one who is worth of our worship. Once again, go to the book of Psalms in order to find out more about God.)

The goal of your work during these two days is to develop a list of items you can go to and read when you find yourself worrying. Remember that worry in such a way as to be torn apart is a sin. If God says that you can’t do it, then He will provide THE way of escape as 1 Corinthians 10:13 clearly states. THE WAY OF ESCAPE is correct praying, thinking, and doing.

Friday and Saturday: (Philippians 4:9)

Moving from Acting to Correct Acting:

Now that you have studied what it means to pray and think correctly, you need to wrap up your study on worry with how to act correctly. The typical actions of those who worry can vary widely, which is why the American Psychological Association has more than 13 different labels of disorders dealing with the problem of anxiety and worry.

God has given very clear commands about what to do when worry comes knocking. Remember that this is not an easy thing to do and will require hard work on your part. Paul calls this working out your salvation. It is holy sweating and we are all called to do it as children of God. The goal of these last two days is to move what you should be doing out of the realm of thinking and into the realm of doing.

Once again, if you take the proper time and use the proper amount of mental energy through doing this work, you will know what you have to do and how you have to do it. The only step that will be left after this is actually doing it. This can be the hardest part. Recruit people to help keep you accountable.

1. Get busy with your responsibilities. What are all of the different labels that you have in life and what responsibilities come with those labels?
 - Man/Woman, Dad/Mom, Boss/Employee, Teacher/Student, Citizen, Daughter/Son, Brother/Sister, Parent/Child, Rich/Poor, etc.
 - What are the responsibilities that fall under each one? Lead/Submit, Counsel/Listen, Give/Take, Teach/Obey, Pay/Work, etc.
 - If you are not doing what God commands, then there is every reason to believe that you are doing things in your own power, which means that worry will creep in and take over.
2. Do what God commands. This is a simple phrase yet one of the hardest things to do in the world, literally. Read Romans 7:14-20 to read about Paul’s struggle with this same thing. You will spend a lifetime struggling to do what God commands, but God will be there and the Holy Spirit will equip and enable you to do what God commands. This will only happen when you set your mind on doing what He wants you to do.

3. Remember that you have not changed until you are doing what God wants habitually, automatically, and comfortably. Always remember this saying, "A thief who stops stealing, is simply in between jobs, but a thief who stops stealing and starts giving is a changed man." You are only changed when you start to do what God wants you to do habitually.
4. This is a daily effort for the rest of your life.