

INTRODUCTION

Christianity Today once had an **article** entitled: “God Made Me to Laugh”.

- in it its author wrote: “Once upon a time many church goers suspected anything funny was subversive. Yesterday's pilgrim didn't dare to clown, & Plymouth squeezed itself into a poker-face.
- “Those old sober-sides really scrambled goodness with solemnity. The Calvinist was so afraid of fun's consequences, that they tried, at their frantic worst, to wipe off every smile, & turn off the organ music. They wouldn't let artists play with color on a canvass or in stain-glass windows, so that the apostles looked as dead as cigar-store Indians!”

Well, you know, we are probably saying that were the Pilgrims & Puritans of yesteryear.

- yet isn't true that our Christianity can often seem so gloomy & depressing?
- isn't Christianity often made to be seen as something so frigid & formal because we see it as just a set of doctrines we must believe & religious rituals & rules we must routinely & regularly do?
- we can put such great emphasis on the fact that true faith is a correct knowledge of biblical truths that we give the impression Christianity is mostly of the head.
- Christianity then becomes just a collection of cold creeds & dull, dead doctrines.

Somehow we forget & fail to equally emphasize that faith is also a matter of the **heart**.

- that it involves emotions too & a life of praise & thanksgiving to Lord with all our heads & hearts, all our feelings & will, all our words & works—the total person.
- & when someone gets emotional about Jesus & the Christian faith & life & expresses joy & love to Lord with “hallelujahs” & “amens” & with raised hands, we get uncomfortable.
 - or we become suspicious about their sincerity & question the reality of their faith.
 - or we think they are little odd & that their Christianity is too superficial.

Th'fore we often give impression Christianity is anything but joy.

- that to be real Christian we must always be sober & strait-faced except on rare occasions like Thanksgiving Day & Christmas & Easter.

But, you see, that's not the Christianity of **Bible**.

- for Bible's message is in no way gloom & doom; its writers were anything but kill-joys.
- to be sure, Scriptures talk about very serious things & present profound, deep doctrines regarding God & Jesus Christ, sin & death & hell.

Yet in no way does it teach them as mere, cold, intellectual facts.

- but it presents them as good news of great joy about the full & free salvation & eternal life God has accomplished in Jesus; about wonderful, eternal pardon & purification & peace we have in Him.
- & **Bible** presents these saving facts as living truths that must fill our daily lives with joy.

Well then, there is 1 place in **Scripture** that surely indicates Christians aren't to be sober & straight-faced or so cold & gloomy, --

- but we must be alive & filled with joy, & we must make our Christian faith a matter of our hearts & feelings, as well our heads & hands & will.
- & that place is Phil.4 where we are commanded to rejoice always.

And we want consider that truth found in vs.4-9 about **JUMPING FOR JOY** as we have just celebrated another **Thanksgiving** & will soon celebrate **Christmas**.

- then our thanks to Lord will be sincere & really joy-filled.
- & not just once a year, but every day in everything.

Now as we consider this we want to notice the following:

- **1st** the when we must be joyful, **2nd** the why we can be joy-filled.
- **3rd** the way to be joyful, & **4th** the result of being joy-filled.

I. THE WHEN

You know, it's so hard, isn't it to be joy-filled Christians these days?

- for after all, there are people & pressures, our own private prisons, troubles & threats of war & violence, crises & catastrophes, events & experiences like our recent campaigns & elections constant shootings.
 - all kinds of evil & error, severe pain & problems surround us.
 - they all can so easily rob us of joy & make life just plain miserable that we become pessimistic & even down-right scared.
- so why not just junk Thanksgiving & Christmas, & go on trying to survive.

Well, that's not what God wants, for He commands in **Phil.4** that we must "rejoice always".

- & in IThe.5 He also commands us to have joy & give thanks always.
- in other words, Scripture never says we may be joyful & give thanks only in the good times.
 - only when we want or feel like it, or when circumstances are just right for us.

No, but our **text** says **WHEN** we must rejoice & that is **ALWAYS**--in the bad times when we don't feel like it.

- not only must we be joyful & praise & thank Lord when there are those good times in life & things are running smoothly.
 - but also when life is such downer in those tough & trying times that make life so messy & wretched.
- so then whatever the situation in our lives, despite difficulties & pain & sin that come, Bible says we can & must rejoice always.

II. THE WHY

But now why can we keep on being joyful & thankful in all conditions of life?

- you see, it's quite easy to be upbeat when things are going good.
- but when a spouse or parent dies; we lose our job, flunk a test, are diagnosed with a disease, --
 - when we find it hard to deal with people like a crabby teacher, a classmate who pokes fun at you, an angry client, a pushy sales-person, --
 - when we are restricted due to illness, pain, old age, or a handicapped body boxes us in, --

- when there are possessions & pleasures we want but we can't get them, --
- discouragements, disappointments, despair, depressions flood our souls, --
- well, that's another story—it can make us very unhappy.

Yet **Bible** says we can & we must be joy-filled at all & anytime, & **Phil.4** says WHY we can do that.

- it is because the joy it is talking about doesn't depend on external events & experiences.
- you see, real Christian joy isn't a shallow, superficial, temporal thing.
 - it is never determined by how we feel at the moment or by what's happening in our lives or in the world around us.
- it is not controlled by things, by how much or little material possessions & pleasures we may have.

Instead the secret of rejoicing always is that real, biblical joy depends on & is only found in being “IN LORD”.

- in other words, real, lasting joy depends on & is found only in Jesus Christ & what He has done for us through His cross & resurrection, & is still doing for us as Lord of all.
- you see, He has rescued us from sin & death & brought us back to eternal life.
 - restored us into God's loving favor & friendship again.
 - & He continues to renew us from evil & error through Holy Spirit.

Th'fore, in Christ by faith, there is all & everything we need for our complete salvation & for a joy-filled, thankful living.

- though sin can be so real & guilt can get us down, we still can & must rejoice because in Lord all our sins are forgiven & we are no longer guilty before God.
- though life at times can be such a pain & things can so easily rob us of joy, yet despite it all, in Lord, we can & we must be joyful.

For, when we totally trust & thrust entire ourselves to Jesus, --

- then we have His ever-present power & all-sufficient grace & strength to live today & tomorrow & the next day & endure its difficulties, & we are able to face death too.
- for we will peacefully know & feel all is well no matter how severe the strife, the sorrow, the sickness, the suffering because we are sure He is always with us & working for us.
 - & we know it is all for our eternal gain & glory.
- & so we also know for sure we have eternal life with a bright hope for the future, beyond death & the grave: the hope of eternal glory with God forever.

Now that's something to really rejoice & be thankful about even when times are tough.

- for how we ever can be cold & unemotional when we are in Lord & His for time & eternity so that we are forever saved & safe & secure no matter what happens.
- instead we have all reason in the world to be happiest people around.
 - & we will be sharing our joy in Him with everyone everywhere.

III. THE WAY

But now did you notice that to be joyful in everything is **COMMAND** from God?

- that being joy-filled in everything is a duty for all us Christians to obey?

- & what a startling statement that is when we realize that!

No wonder, when **Paul** points out that we must rejoice always is God's command, he repeats it.

- for he knew we would ask: "What are you saying, Paul? Joy is a duty? You got to be kidding!"
- that's why he says: "Yes, you heard me right. But I will say it again: 'Rejoice'!"

Joy then is God's will for our lives so that it means we must will it & work at it.

- we must work at attaining & making & maintaining constant joy as a real, conscientious, continuing experience & exercise of our hearts & lives.
- God then wants us to daily desire & be determined to do all we can to cultivate constant joy regardless what is happening.

But now we may be saying: "Can we actually do that?"

- well, answer is we surely can because Phil.4 also tells THE WAY to do it.

And 1st thing it says is found in that familiar vs.13.

- "I can do everything through him who gives me strength."
- that's the basic way we can rejoice always: it is by being in Christ.

But, as I said, we must then go on & work at experiencing & exercising joy at all times.

- th'fore Phil.4 says in vs.5-9 there is the way to be able to consciously do that.
- the way we can live to overcome forces that can rob us of joy & drag us down to the lower level of Christian living.

1st, vs.5 says, the way to rejoice always is that we must be concerned about others by letting our "gentleness be evident to all".

- for when we put self in center of our hearts & lives so we focus only on ourselves & our own situations, -
 - that we selfishly think we have the right to be happy at all costs, —
 - & that we greedily desire to have our own way & all the world's goods for ourselves, --
- that will never bring true, eternal joy & peace, satisfaction & contentment & thanksgiving.
 - instead that will only bring misery.
 - for then there will only be a mad scramble to satisfy the bottomless pit of our own selfish desires at expense of others & ourselves.

Th'fore **Bible** says real, lasting joy can be ours only when we turn from ourselves to God & others.

- only when we have & practice Christ's attitude & actions of gentleness & big-heartedness & God-like consideration & care for others.
 - only when we lose ourselves in loving & helping & serving others--even those who hurt us.
 - only then will we experience real joy & be truly thankful.
- for our problems will disappear or be small in comparison to the difficulties of those we are caring for.

The 2nd way we can & we must cultivate constant joy is, vs.6 says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer & petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

- you see, what so easily robs us of joy is when we get so uptight & worry about the difficult situations in life.
- but when our passage says not be anxious, it is saying we must not become “all hot & bothered” about what life brings.
 - we must not fret & fuss ourselves into paralyzing fear.

And the antidote to such anxiety--to being all bent out of shape nervously & wearily & wearily, worrying about what life brings--is that we must take all our concerns to God.

- as I Peter 5 says: “We must dump it all into God’s lap.
- & let Him have complete control of our lives & care for us, as He promises.

So then, to rejoice always, our **text** says we must **PRAY** to Lord.

- for prayer takes away our anxiety as we bring our worries to God.
 - that's because, when we pray, we realize who is in control of every circumstance.
 - & we are trusting that He is totally able to handle it so that we can leave the whole matter in His hands to deal with.
- you see, prayer points us away from ourselves to Lord & his promise & power.

But too, we can rejoice always by being **THANKFUL** to Lord in every experience.

- for thanksgiving also takes away anxiety & fear in the middle of strife.
- that's because being thankful in all things points us to God who does all things well with a loving purpose, which never fails.
 - & so we can accept all anxious circumstances as something that our all-wise, all-loving, all-ruling God has allowed & is using for our good.
- & then there will be constant joy & peace that He keeps & cares for us & will never let us go.

The 3rd way we can have constant joy is, as vs.8 says, we must not dwell on the negative or how bad things are.

- instead we must think on the positive & prize highly & be influenced by the good things of God.
- the idea here is we must drill & discipline our minds so that we dwell only on what God approves of: what is true & noble, right & pure, lovely & admirable.
 - any & all things that are excellent & praiseworthy.
- then we will be filled with joy & peace, with serenity & satisfaction & victory no matter what.

Now vs.9 says another way to rejoice always is we must not just hear what God has to say about how to be always joy-filled.

- but we must also put into practice in our daily living all that we hear & learn from Bible.
- th'fore, when we worry & we become anxious, then we must take ourselves in hand.
 - tell ourselves to stop!
 - then turn to Phil.4, read it twice prayerfully & thankfully.

IV. THE RESULT

Then, when we deal with all conditions of life by rejoicing in Lord always, --

- & cultivate this constant joy by loving like Christ, by surrounding all situations by prayer & thanksgiving, & disciplining our minds & lives with positive, godly thinking, & doing God's Word & will, --
- then vs.7 says **THE RESULT** will be this: “the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard our hearts & minds in Christ Jesus.”
 - & vs.9 says: “The God of peace will be with you.”

That means in Christ by faith we will possess & experience from God real peace or shalom, authentic wholeness & a sense of genuine security that all things are well, now & forever.

- we will have peace with Him, & peace with others & peace with ourselves.
- a supernatural, divine peace that is greater than all understanding.
 - deeper than any suffering, powerful enough to master all anxiety.
 - plenty strong to mend broken relationships with God & others & ourselves.
 - sufficiently mighty to preserve & protect us in all & any circumstance.
- indeed, a real, never ending peace that includes salvation & power & victory now & forever.

I like the story about **2 artists** who created their idea of peace with an oil painting.

- one chose to paint a mountain lake nestled in the hills with green trees growing down to its banks.
 - there was not a cloud in the sky, not a bird, not even a ripple on the surface of the lake.
- the entire scene was one of peace & tranquility.

But the **2nd artist** painted a scene of the deeper peace **Bible** talks about, as here in **Phil.4.**

- his painting was of a tumultuous waterfall, cascading over the rocks, sending its spray up into the air.
 - jutting from the cliffs was a twisted tree.
 - &, amid all that turmoil, there in the crotch of a branch a nest rests & a mother bird is feeding her young undisturbed & serene.
- that scene more adequately portrays God’s peace that we have in Him so we can always rejoice in all & every situation of life.

CONCLUSION

Yes, you see, when we have that peace in Lord, then we can & will rejoice always.

- actually our text is saying we will jump for joy.
- the picture here is of a little boy or girl jumping for joy as they open a birthday or Christmas gift.
 - it’s something, I’m sure, we all have seen or experienced.

That’s what **Bible** is saying here in **Phil.4.**

- in all things, in Lord, with His peace, we can & we must be jumping for joy.
- jumping for joy today, tomorrow & everyday, in everything, no matter whether we are experiencing good or bad times. AMEN