

Daily Devotional, March 31, 2020 Joy In The Midst Of Uncertainty

Joy is a common theme in Jesus' teachings. The key to our joy is living intimately with Jesus, the source of all joy. When we are in an intimate relationship with Him, we experience God's care and protection and victory against all odds.

In Philippians Chapter 4, the Apostle Paul tells us to "stand firm in the Lord", by following his teachings that he had given them previously, which we find in chapter 3:20-21: by "keeping our eyes on Christ", to remember that "this world is not our home", and to focus on the fact that, "Christ will bring everything under His control". Stand firm.

So, what does this have to do with joy? First, it is good to understand Paul's situation at that time. Paul was sitting in a Roman prison, thanking the people of the church that he had established in Philippi for their generous gift, and yet, was encouraging them in their faith.

Paul's joy comes in his serving. He begins chapter 2 of this book by saying to the church, "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete, by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:1-4)

Paul then tells the church: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" It seems strange that a man in prison would be telling a church to rejoice. But Paul's attitude teaches us an important lesson: our inner attitudes do not have to reflect our outer circumstances. Paul was full of joy because he knew that no matter what happened to him, Jesus was with him. Several times throughout this letter he urges the Philippians to be joyful, possibly because, like us in our present circumstances, they needed to hear this. It's easy to get discouraged over unpleasant events, or even unimportant events taken too seriously. If you haven't felt much joy as of late, you may need to take on a different perspective.

Ultimate joy comes from Christ dwelling within us. Jesus is near, and at His second coming, we will fully realize this ultimate joy. He who lives within us will fulfill His ultimate purposes for us. We are to be gentle, never anxious about anything, full of thanksgiving, and above all, full of God's peace.

You may be wondering, "How on earth am I not to be anxious in the midst of this horrible pandemic?" Paul tells us to turn our worries into prayers. Pray more! God's peace is different from the world's. It's not just keeping a positive mental attitude. It comes from knowing that God is in control. Knowing that our citizenship in God's Kingdom is certain, the victory over sin and death is sealed, and our anxiety can give way to God's ultimate peace!

What we put into our minds determines how we react. Paul urges us to have thoughts that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy. Take note of what you put into your mind through television, the internet, magazines, books, movies, social media, conversations, or any other way that you gather information. Make better choices. Kick out the harmful input and replace it with more wholesome, more positive messages.

Above all, read God's Word and pray more regularly. We all have a lot more time now to read. Dive into your Bible and focus your mind on what is good and pure. It takes discipline and practice, but through perseverance, it can be done!

Most of all, put your reading and study into practice. It's easy to read the Bible and yet not practice what we learn. Many of us would rather debate what a passage means, and then not follow it because it is too difficult. Exposing ourselves to God's Word must lead to obedience, otherwise it is worthless. It's much like listening to a sermon and then thinking afterward, "Sure pastor, that's all nice, but you surely don't mean me?" (Yawn)

Though Paul was a prisoner in Rome, he had learned the secret of joy and peace—imitating Christ and serving others. When we focus our minds on Christ, we learn unity, humility, joy and peace. We also find the motivation we need to live in Him, and to then live confidently *for* Him, knowing that we have the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ with us. What joy!

Prayer: Gracious God, in the midst of our anxiety and anxiousness, we often fall into states of moodiness and depression. We are ever so grateful for people like Paul who you inspired through your Holy Spirit to teach and lead by example, showing us that although life can put us in what may feel like desperate situations, you are always there. Help us to be more devoted to prayer and the reading of your Word, where we know we can find solace and even great **joy** if we will only dedicate time and devotion to learning our life lessons from you. Be patient with us for we are yet on this pilgrimage to eternal life with you. In the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ in whom our joy is found, Amen.