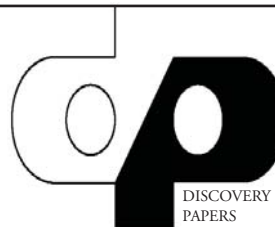


# COME AND REJOICE FOR OUR GOD REIGNS

SERIES: WORSHIP



Catalog No. 100214  
Philippians 4:4-7  
3rd Message  
Judy Herminghaus  
February 14, 2010

Much to my surprise Carol Lind's son and my son share a love of Country Western music especially that of Brookes and Dunn. My boys tell me that the reason country music is so great is that it often tells a story. After hearing the lyrics of the song *I Believe* I might become a fan as well. The journey of faith this song recounts seems an appropriate introduction to the passage we are going to hear this morning. The lyrics are too long to read to you so I will tell you the story and read you the refrain of *I Believe*.

There was a young boy who lived down the road from a very old man named Mr. Wrigley. This boy's mother sent him over to Mr. Wrigley's house with undisclosed things which I imagine were cookies, soups, things like that. The old man and boy struck up a friendship and pretty soon long summer days were spent on Mr Wrigley's porch swing, listening to the tales of the old man's life. He was in the Navy during WWII and once he had a wife and a baby but they died long ago. The boy got up his courage once and asked him how he lived through a tragedy like that without going crazy and the old man said:

"I raise my hands, bow my head

I'm finding more and more truth in the words written in red

They tell me that there's more to life than just what I can see

Oh, I believe.

Years later when this young boy became a young man and was in college his mother called and told him old man Wrigley had died. Later that night the young man thought about those long ago summers and he didn't know whether to cry or not. If anyone deserved to be in heaven it would be his sweet old friend. At the end of the song the young man says that he is not able to quote the chapter or the verse but he is more and more convinced that what we see on earth is not all there is, so he takes a page from old man Wrigley's book and he says:

"When I raise my hands, bow my head

I'm finding more and more truth in the words written in red

They tell me that there's more to life than just what I can see

Oh, I believe, I believe, I believe, I believe, I believe.

In some ways life doesn't make much sense without faith does it? The old man in this song obviously had a great deal of suffering in his life, yet he found the words of Jesus powerful and true. He believed them and grew a hope of life beyond what he could see. He became a worshiper. The old man's gentle ways with the young boy, sharing life with him on his front porch swing drew the young man to trust in Jesus and become a worshiper as well.

As this song tells the narrative of these two lives you can see that worshipers of God are not born out of easy circumstances, or carefree life experiences. More often than not Jesus' followers have found him present with them in their hardest moments. In the New Testament a desperate father brought his demon possessed son to Jesus for healing. He said to Jesus, "...if you

are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us." Jesus said to him, "If you are able! All things can be done for the one who believes." The father cried out, "I believe, help my unbelief!" Mark 9:24

We believe yet, when difficulties come, and life seems way out of our control and going in the wrong direction, for a very long time sometimes, we often get anxious and worry and wonder if Jesus really will show up for us. Our prayers are a mixture of help me help me help me, with instructions to God: this way, this way this way. As if He does not have the best way forward for us in his mind. I know for many of us today job insecurity and high mortgage payments, unemployment, health issues, and many other problems may be the source of sleepless nights. The earthquake in Haiti challenges the whole world to consider how it is living and how to help such an unfortunate people, and why such awful things happen in the first place. We believe and yet sometimes we are like the father crying out to Jesus, "I believe, help me in my unbelief! The Christian life is a journey. Some of our days are happy carefree days and many are tremendously sad and disappointing, but in all of them the apostle Paul says we are to rejoice! Rejoice? Why? For two reasons: We are in the Lord and He is near.

Our text for this morning is Philippians 4:4-7. The apostle Paul wrote this letter to his brothers and sisters in Philippi from a prison cell in Rome. Paul was imprisoned for his bold preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and when or if we will be released is unknown. His letter is full of thanksgiving and affirmation of the Philippians who had sent him a care package with a messenger to minister to Paul. The Philippians were faithful servants of the gospel, and like Paul himself, were undergoing persecution and suffering for their faith at the hands of Rome. Two of the women leaders in the Philippian church were arguing and causing disunity which seems to be the only internal problem going on in this beloved church.

So, the context for our letter finds Paul in prison, his church under persecution, and two women at odds with each other and threatening the unity of the church. And this is Paul's most joyful letter. Fourteen times in this short letter Paul encourages the Philippians to rejoice!

So let's read the entire passage and then examine them one by one. Verses 4-7:

**Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

Paul commands joy?

Verse 4 says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again:

Rejoice!”

For Paul rejoicing is not an option but a Christian’s way of life. In this verse the command to rejoice is repeated two times for emphasis. It begins and ends the sentence actually. And it is given to the entire community of believers. Paul is saying it like this to the community of Christians at Philippi: “you all, rejoice!” This command can sound really “trite” if we don’t consider the context. To rejoice, to be glad, to have joy, to delight when you are persecuted or suffering is a feat of faith don’t you think? And Paul is calling on them to do just that. He is telling them to delight in the Lord despite any and every negative experience in life, as well as in the bright happy times. It is not about being happy for the circumstances, but about being happy in God which is cause for rejoicing.

We have a new puppy in our home. When I think of what joy looks like I think of him. When I come home from work and he greets me everything in his body is moving. He is wiggling from head to foot, his ears lay back and you can almost believe he is smiling. Then he begins to jump up and down trying to get up into my arms and he is like some amazingly quick jack in the box. He likes me a lot. Actually I would say he is crazy about me. Every part of him shows how he feels about me coming home. He is rejoicing. There are reasons that he likes me this much. I feed him, take him for walks, hold him in my lap, pet him a great deal, and I love him too.

His response is my only reward for the care I give him. And his delight in me is worth it. It makes me happy.

Could it be that our rejoicing in God is something like what this puppy does when I come into his presence? How is it for God when we are just so internally excited to be with him? What if we let all our joy out and we even jumped up and down in his presence? It might tell him we are just crazy about him. For everything he is and does for us he has already shown us that he loves us and rejoices in us. His only reward for all of what he is and has done is that we delight in Him in response.

But happy in God does not mean putting on a happy face and pretending all the time that everything is great. We don’t have to muster up joy and hide all the pain and sorrow that we may be experiencing. But rather, we acknowledge these thoughts and feelings to God and in real community we hold one another up in prayer and encourage one another to keep on truckin’ with the bigger picture of Christ’s rule in mind.

Paul’s command to rejoice in this passage is a call to remember the bigger picture. The bigger picture of their lives in Christ is that they are headed for a great future and in that they can rejoice now. Paul knows they are suffering for their faith. He knows that they are probably going to see more suffering in the future. Think about it: You don’t have to tell the most joyful person or group you know to rejoice they are already doing that, but you might tell the suffering ones to rejoice as an encouragement to remember truths they may have forgotten or are in danger of forgetting.

Paul’s call to rejoice is a reminder to the Philippians to put Christ first. To remember that he is their true center not what they see in front of them. Take the two fighting women in this church for instance. They are fighting over things which are of far less substance than the unity they have in Christ. Forgetting the big picture of the gospel and all that the good news of Christ has meant to them they are settling for argument and disunity. Rejoicing in the Lord calls on believers to focus attention on Jesus once again and not on circumstances. And in focusing

on Jesus the things he has promised come into view. Paul has taught the Philippians : (3:20) “Our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. (NIV) He will transform our earthly bodies into glorious bodies like his own. He’ll make us beautiful and whole with the same powerful skill by which he is putting everything as it should be, under and around him.”<sup>1</sup>

So to rejoice in the Lord is not wishful thinking, or refusal to see reality clearly, rejoicing is a response of worship which comes out of a mind and heart set on Christ as the center of life, and a conviction that his promises as sure as the sun which rises daily. The key phrase in this little verse is IN THE LORD. We do not rejoice that we are rich, smart, living in the sunshine state, have three successful children; we rejoice that we are “in the Lord.” Carl Barth says that Paul’s exhortation to joy is Paul’s nevertheless to all the circumstances of life.<sup>2</sup> “For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain,” Paul declares in Phil 1:21.

## Rejoicing takes practice

Rejoicing is something we practice over time and in which we may improve. In the opening story I told you there was an old man who lived a long life. On the journey of his life he learned more and more to trust Jesus. It is the same for us. We grow more delighted with Jesus as we know him better and trust him more throughout our lives. We can grow in our ability to rejoice in the Lord always. Some of our older saints in this room are evidence that we do indeed mature in our ability to rejoice always.

I gave a Christmas ornament to someone years ago and on it was written *Joy!* I gave it to an earnest, self reflective Christian who looked at it and with great emotion said, “I don’t have any of that.” That confession began a journey of prayer and seeking God in which a deeper relationship with God and the healing of a community took place.

Wherever you find yourself this morning – a rejoicing bright spirit or a little bit wilted around the edges – remember the truth that *in Christ* we have a bright future and his presence within us to call upon now. Choosing to rejoice in our relationship with Christ is indeed that – a choice to acknowledge him as our “treasure in the field for which we would sell everything just to have him.” When we discover a gap between our feelings and the reality of Christ it is our invitation to come to Jesus in prayer. He will answer our prayer and help us arrange our minds and hearts to his will and purposes.

So, rejoice! We are Christ’s. He has saved us and we are his. He is coming again for us. He is living inside us through the Holy Spirit of God who indwells us and is transforming us into Christ’s image. Rejoice! It is something we may give God as our response of worship. May it please him.

## Gentleness that is evident to all

Next Paul commands the Philippians to let their gentleness be evident to all.

Verse 5 says, “Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.”

Two things here we can stop and consider. To let or allow our gentleness show is to say believers have gentleness in them, or available to them. And the Lord is near is the motivation given for letting our gentleness show.

Now the first consideration in verse five is that we all have gentleness. That might be kind of a surprise. Many of us might not feel gentle. If you are a guy you might not even want to be the “gentle” type, or if you have been a “weak” person in relationships and you know you need to get more assertive you may not want any more gentleness, but is that the kind of gentleness Paul is calling on in this passage?

“In Christ” is Paul’s favorite way of saying that everything that is Christ is within the believer through the Holy Spirit of God. Gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit as is joy (Gal 5:22) so it is available to the believer. Gentleness is defined as “yielding one to another.” It is mild, meek, kind. The two fighting women in the Philippian church were not showing gentleness to one another and it was hurting their witness in the church as well as in danger of hurting their witness outside the church.

In Paul’s theology gentleness is most often accompanied by majesty. For Paul only one full of power can display gentleness.<sup>3</sup> An apt metaphor for Pauline gentleness might be the lion who lays down with the lamb and never hurts it. Paul’s example is Jesus for this kind of gentleness:

## Jesus is our example

Jesus was gentle or meek, but this gentleness was anything but weak. This meekness or gentleness that Jesus displayed is often described as strength under the control. When insulted and tortured at the hands of his enemies he offered no defense but entrusted himself to his father. The lion of Judah, Jesus, went to the cross like a sheep to the slaughter, but not out of powerlessness, but out of surrender to the will of God. Paul writes about his gentle humility in Phil 2 and tells the Philipians to have the same attitude in themselves.

Paul writes in Philippians 2:6-11:

Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,  
but made himself nothing,  
taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

For his obedience to the father in giving himself up to die on the cross in our place, God raised Jesus up to the highest place where he is enthroned now. Jesus reigns now in the heavenly places (invisible realm). One day all earth and all heaven will come under his rule and every knee shall bow and tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. We await that day in hope

and we rejoice to see it coming.

The application for us of course is that we don’t have to fight for our rights, or try to rule over one another for in following Christ’s example we can trust God to vindicate us in his time. And we can know that Jesus is ruling right now. We have access to the king of the universe, who fights on our behalf and leads us on to victory. We can trust ourselves to him. He is able to do abundantly beyond what we can ask or think. Our gentleness which is really strength under the control of God is then our response of worship to our King who dwells within us and is coming again.

## Paul’s personal walk with gentleness

Now gentleness must really mean something to Paul for he was not a naturally gentle person. He was after all the number one persecutor of Christ’s church until suddenly out of the blue the resurrected Christ appeared to him on the Damascus road, and stopped him in his self righteous tracks and turned him around to be the church’s number one lover. What a shock! Paul was running about the countryside persecuting every Christian he could find and then suddenly he was in the presence of Christ and all his self righteous zealous activity as persecutor of the church was found to be in error. How humbling for Paul. He could never have forgotten that. So the Lord is near which is the reason Paul gives for letting our gentleness show to everyone is something that Paul has learned from personal experience.

We don’t want to be caught on our Damascus Road ungentle and opposing God. So, how do we access gentleness? The Lord is near, the Psalmist David tells us, and when we call on him in prayer he will answer. Want to let your joy and gentleness out? Call on God in prayer. We can ask him moment by moment to help us yield to his Spirit within us, so that his gentleness pours out of us. And we can remember that the Lord is near and coming soon.

The Lord is near is motivation for keeping the faith. He is coming and will rule and reign forever and ever. This end time view centers us in the bigger salvation story and helps us remember where we are going and clarifies what is important about now. Paul carries this big picture of Christ’s reign as his compass. Jesus’ reign as King is Paul’s truth north. Since he and we don’t know if Jesus is coming today, or tomorrow or if we will be going to him in death soon, he is always near.

In Romans 8 Paul writes, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.” “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time...Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we eagerly await our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

Someday all that the Spirit of God has filled us with will be fully realized. What is inside us through the Holy Spirit of God will shine forth in glory when Jesus returns to set the world straight. We will share in Christ’s glory. Our bodies will be glorified – perfect like Christ’s in every way. All creation will be renewed. Eager expectation of this promise is how the apostle lived and how he commands us to live.

The apostle John was given a glimpse into that glorious day and he writes of it in Revelation 21:1-5:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first

heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

What a glorious hope we have in Christ. He is near and we have nothing to fear, but only things to rejoice in. You know how important this is?

Our world is in total confusion and fear about the future of our world. Take a look at the many movies recently released or about to be released which concern the end of the world. It seems those outside the church know or fear the end is coming but they don't know what to hope for or who to hope in. I read the Pulitzer Prize winning book *The Road* over Christmas holiday. It is a post-apocalyptic book in which a father and son try to survive a dead and dying world filled with savage people and a hopeless future. They follow a road, heading west hoping that in California they will find warmth, something living in a positive way. The father lives for the son and the son for the father. There is a tiny ray of hope in the book that perhaps their love is reason enough to live or that goodness will find them somehow. This beautifully written book is so sad. It is bleak, bleak, bleak, and it expresses this emptiness and deadness with a landscape which is only gray. The sky is gray, the ground is gray – everything is covered with ash and dying. What a hopeless journey this book tells and it is not the truth. There is hope. There is hope because the Lord is near. And when he comes everything will be made beautiful. Remember Jesus's words to John in Revelation, write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

The world needs real hope. The world needs to know there is a bright future and it is found in God. The world needs to know the Lord is near and that is a good thing.

May our gentleness in our speech, and behavior win us an audience to speak to our world about these things. Gentleness is attractive, it is one of the characteristics of Christ which drew sinners and outcasts to him. It is a soothing balm for a hurting world which needs hope.

## Let us demonstrate a confidence in our Lord and give up fear

Verse 6 says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

Based on the great future we have in Christ and his nearness to us now through the Holy Spirit of God who we may access in prayer at any time over any issue, then by Paul's reasoning there is nothing to be anxious about. For the antidote to worry and fear is to pray about everything. Give all your worries concerns fears to God in prayer and thank him for answering it all with his presence and in his timing. Last week we did that imagining a platter in which we placed all our worries, concerns and fears

and sins. We can do that daily in prayer and the Lord will take those burdens from us and there is a promise in the next verse – he will give us peace in their place. It is a great exchange.

Jesus' words in Matt 6:25-30 came alive to me one summer. I had been studying "resting in God" for my intern class in a pretty complete way. I had looked up every passage in Old and New Testament which spoke about resting in God. So one summer day as I was walking through a meadow filled with yellow wild flowers and not a soul in sight one of the passages I studied came to mind. I remembered Jesus saying, "...I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ...Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown in the oven, will he not much more clothe you?" (Matthew 6:25-30 NKJV)

As I contemplated the beauty and promise of these words Jesus' nearness was palpable. In his presence these words became mine. I believed them at some deep place within me. I knew through these words that I was deeply loved. Not because there was anything particularly praise worthy about me, but just because I was God's. God uses his word and our prayers as a doorway to his nearness and it is so sweet.

Paul is encouraging us to live this kind of life. Studied in God, praying to him about everything, rejoicing in Him, and thanking him for everything he is and has done for us. These are actually the three legs of Jewish piety: Rejoicing, Prayer and Thanksgiving.<sup>4</sup> And there is a promise to living this kind of life in God:

## Peace to guard hearts and minds

Verse 7 says, "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

There is a supernatural peace which can only come from God which will dwell within us over time when we seek God out and give our worries and anxious thoughts to him. It is given. This peace is the opposite of anxious worrying fearful thoughts. It comes as a fruit of prayer where we dwell in God's presence who is peace. This centering, calm, sense that all is well with my soul comes from being with Jesus. And it acts as a protective garrison around our hearts and minds. How do we think we can live a life of hope and faith without hanging out with God in prayer? And who doesn't want peace? I love it when I feel peace in my soul. It is a big roomy kind of thing, calm, confident, and gentle. It is like sitting in your living room with a really good book, the fire is lit, it is raining outside and you have a cup of hot chocolate you are sipping slowly. As you revel in your novel your slippers and bathrobe keep you warm and cozy and comfortable. That is the closest I can come to expressing inner peace – It is what I feel in the presence of Jesus in prayer. We need his peace as we journey in this life. There are many hills and valleys we experience. Days of joy and of sorrow. How good it is to know that he is near and joy and gentleness and peace are in his presence and available to us.

I am going to close with a little tale from Ken Gire's book,

## *The Weathering Grace of God.*<sup>5</sup>

“Van Gogh is known for his paintings, not his sermons, yet one led to the other as naturally as spring leads to summer. His first pastorate was in a tumbledown town of coal miners...he preached this sermon in 1877. He told the miners that they were strangers on this earth, that all of us were strangers on this earth, fellow travelers on our way home.

Van Gogh talked about the joys and sorrows of that journey then used a painting of an autumn landscape to illustrate his point. In the distance a row of mountains stood hazed in dusk. The peaks splayed the setting sun, whose rays touched the underbellies of clouds, turning common silver to gold and gold to royal purple. The leaves of the landscape were yellow, like the September leaves of Colorado Aspen. A road ...cut through the landscape to a distant mountain. Crowning the mountain was a city, glowing in the sunset.

On the road was a weary traveler, van Gogh told them, staff in hand, who encountered an angel that had been placed there to encourage those on their way to the eternal city. Then van Gogh gave the words that he imagined might have passed between them.

The traveler asked: “Does the road go uphill all the way?”

The angel answered: “Yes, to the very end.”

And he asked again: “And will the journey take all day long?”

The angel said: “From morning till night, my friend.”

The traveler journeyed on, sorrowful yet rejoicing. Sorrowful because the road was so steep and long. Rejoicing because he was closer to the destination that was home to his deepest longings. As he continued the climb, a quiet prayer rose from his lips:

“Then I shall be more and more tired...but also nearer and nearer to Thee.”

May we lift our arms and bow our heads, as the rule of Jesus becomes ever more near to us in faith. Come and rejoice for our God reigns!

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Eugene Peterson, *The Message*. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1995) p. 406.

<sup>3</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> Gordon Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Ken Gire, *The Weathering Grace of God* (Servant Publications, Ann Arbor, 2001).

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