

"I Do Rejoice, Yea, and Will Rejoice!"

"Rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS: and AGAIN I say, Rejoice!"—Phil. 4:4.

This is the most intimate and personal of Paul's ecclesial epistles. The ecclesia at Philippi was the first established by Paul in Europe—in response to the vision of the Man of Macedonia. It was there that Paul went on the sabbath day to the place of prayer by the riverside, and found Lydia, whose heart the Lord touched. This was the beginning of the Philippian ecclesia, which held such a prominent place in the apostle's affections.

The spirit of the epistle to the Philippians is joy, contentment, fraternal affection, and holiness. Its background is loneliness, imprisonment, and the hovering shadow of condemnation and a cruel death, but its keynote is peace and rejoicing. *"I do rejoice, and WILL rejoice!"* the apostle triumphantly exclaims (1:18); and to them he writes—

"Rejoice in the Lord **always**: and **again** I say, REJOICE!" (4:4).

Our minds turn again to that unforgettable scene at midnight in this same city of Philippi years before (Acts 16:23-25)—

"And when they had laid **many stripes** upon them, they **cast** them into prison . . . **thrust** them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks . . . And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and SANG PRAISES UNTO GOD."

What glorious secret was it that these men had? Surely no circumstance could be more physically and mentally miserable and depressing—cast roughly into an inner dungeon to be reserved for more abuse on the morrow—distressingly fastened by the feet in stocks, and racked with the pain of the "many stripes" they had unjustly received.

But they "sang praises unto God." *WHAT for?* This epistle gives the answer—

"Be careful for nothing"—let nothing depress you—"but in everything by prayer and supplication **with thanksgiving** let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, SHALL keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (4:6-7).

Nothing could dim or obscure for Paul the ever-present and overwhelming ecstasy of the love of Christ. He gloried in tribulation (Rom. 5:3), for the bitterest of tribulation only impressed him more intensely with the all-sufficiency of the consolation of Christ—

or "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? **Nay!** In all these things we are **more than conquerors** through him that loved us!" (Rom. 8:35-37).

All these things were everyday experiences with Paul, and he gloried when they flooded down upon him, for each visitation but thrillingly revealed anew their utter powerlessness to pierce the all-protecting armor of the love of Christ in his heart.

"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you," he tells them as he begins his letter (1:3). That must be *our* feeling concerning all our brethren and sisters who are striving toward the mark of the perfection of Christ. Our minds, like Paul's, must be constantly filled with loving thoughts and thankful prayers concerning them.

V. 4—"Always making request **with joy**."

This is an unusual and striking expression—"making request *with joy*"—but it well illustrates the spirit of the epistle. Paul was in prison, writing to dear friends far away whom he longed achingly to see, but still there is not even a hint of any restraint upon his buoyant rejoicing. These are the circumstances in which the wisdom of the Spirit has placed him; these then are the circumstances in which God sees that he can do the most good, or receive the most benefit.

Therefore, though he earnestly desires the freedom and opportunity to enjoy their company and fellowship, he does not let the enforced separation lessen his present joy. He and they rejoice in mutual, understanding love, knowing that "*ALL THINGS work together for good to those that love God,*" content to wait out the sorrows of the brief present in the cheerful confidence of the eternal, cloudless future.

He was confident, he said (v. 6), that God, Who had begun a good work in them, would perform it until the day of Christ. If we are watching for them, we shall find many thrilling references to this glorious Divine mystery which is expressed so boldly later in the epistle—

"It is **God which worketh in you**, both to will and to do of HIS good pleasure."

It is God which worketh in us—if we will let Him—if we will yield and submit, putting aside our own desires, our own plans and hopes and ambitions, and seeking to follow the guiding light of Scripture and Providence from day to day.

"The things which have happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel" (v. 12).

Paul's life was wrapped up in the furtherance of the Gospel of his beloved Master. What did bonds and imprisonment mean to him if they contributed to that end? He turned it all into a powerful and glorious advertisement for Christ (v. 13)—

"My bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places."

And the result went further still (v. 14)—

"**Many** of the brethren, waxing confident in my bonds, are much more"—note the emphasis— "**much more** bold to speak the Word without fear."

Thus he turned a crippling handicap into a stirring inspiration. Such is the power of a fearless example—not only of courage, but more—of *inextinguishable rejoicing*. He not only endured with patience, but in his very enduring he radiated a confidence and peace that inspired others to fearlessness and joy.

"And I therein do rejoice, yea, and WILL rejoice!" (v. 18).

Why?—

"For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (v. 19).

See how he binds up *his* salvation with the power of *their* prayers and Christ's indwelling Spirit. There was no self-sufficiency about Paul. "No man liveth unto himself." Again and again we are impressed with the mutual interdependence of the body of Christ, for so it is ordained in the love and wisdom of God. "*The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee.*"

Paul was humbly conscious that, in the strange and marvellous working of the Divine purpose, the prayer of the least of God's saints could have a bearing upon the issues of his salvation. What a wonderful bond of unity a perception of this truth creates!

V. 21—"To me, to live is Christ."

Here again Paul briefly and beautifully expresses our walk in the world—"To me, to live is Christ." All his life was bound up in Christ—all his activities centered in him.

Outside of Christ *there is no life*—he is the Way of Life—all else is death. How dimly we seem to perceive what was so living and vivid to Paul! "To me, to live is Christ."

V. 27—"Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel."

This epistle contains no criticism or rebuke. But if there was one thing in which Paul thought it advisable to exhort them, this would be it. The thought appears again at the beginning of ch. 2, and again beginning ch. 3. "With one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel."

The brotherhood today is going through a crucial period of purging and tribulation. It *must* drive those that are left closer together—there could be no greater tragedy than to suffer the tribulation without reaping the joys and benefits that the tribulation is Divinely designed to effect. To the apostle, this was the deciding index of success or failure—of sorrow or joy. He pleads (and who could ignore such pleading)—

if "If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort in love, if any fellowship in the Spirit—you have any affection and sympathy—fulfil ye my joy by being of one mind, united in mutual love" (2:1-2).

What relationship is more tender and beautiful than the fellowship of the Truth? Jesus said, "Behold, my mother and my brethren!" But it requires much patience and gentle understanding—

"Let each esteem other better than themselves" (v. 3).

Paul advances this as the basis of mutual love and communion and forbearance. The worth of any individual in the sight of God depends upon his *degree of overcoming*. "Where much is given, much is expected." We cannot judge. Our own record may prove to be the poorest when abilities and opportunities are in the last Great Day weighed against accomplishments. How can we evaluate the efforts and struggles of others? Only God can gauge the bitterness and stress of each heart's secret conflicts.

Paul, in his pleading, but expresses the mind of Christ. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God" is still the most touching and powerful of entreaties. The future of the Berean fellowship may well hinge upon the degree to which we are moved by this entreaty to *enlarge our hearts one to another in the bonds of a love that suffers long and is kind*—hoping all things, bearing all things, and enduring all things.

Paul emphasizes his entreaty by the example of Christ—

of "Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus—he humbled himself, and made himself no reputation" (vs. 5-8).

Christ, the Great Example, was big enough to yield lovingly and cheerfully in everything that concerned his own desires and honor and self-gratification—always seeking peace and putting the pleasure and welfare of others before his own—realizing the utter unimportance of the present, and the immensity of the eternal issues—the *great work of God in him*.

This leads the apostle to that glorious paradox (vs. 12-13)—

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is **God which worketh in you**, both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

"*Work . . . for God worketh in you.*" The mighty, rushing wind of the Spirit is upon you—set your sails to catch every ounce of it, for this is your day of opportunity.

V. 14—"Do all things without murmurings and disputings . . . that ye may be the children of God."

"Without murmurings and disputings." "*Forbearing one another in love*" is the thought—recognizing in others a fellowship of effort, a unity of objective—and overlooking in love the weaknesses and shortcomings which they are perhaps more conscious of, and secretly grieved by, that we are.

BUT—*there must be a sincere unity of objective*, and it can only be the objective the Scriptures hold forth—*the perfection of Christ*. Without this basic agreement there can be no hope of the fellowship of the Spirit. *That* is the real issue today.

V. 15—"Among whom ye shine as lights in the world."

Here indeed our walk in the world is brought into sharp focus. Jesus said likewise, "*Ye are the light of the world.*" The picture we are given by these words is one of a spectacular radiance in the midst of a boundless darkness. Our walk in the world must be such that men will be impressed that we are motivated by a strange, unearthly power. Jesus said (John 13:35)—

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples—if ye have love one to another."

To what extent do we conform to this *essential requirement of discipleship*? Love does not plead the excuse of unloveliness in others—rather in such it finds an opportunity to demonstrate its own unselfishness and power. Paul desired this heavenly fruit in his converts that (v. 16) he might rejoice in the day of Christ that he had not run in vain, for truly unless their spiritual growth in Christ reaches the full ripeness of unselfish, uncomplaining love, his efforts on them had been completely wasted, as on a barren tree.

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He planned (v. 19) to send Timothy to them soon, as his messenger of consolation, he said. And then comes a revealing note which, though infinitely tragic, has an aspect of comfort for us in this dark day (vs. 20-21)—

"I have no one else to send—for all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's."

All were wrapped up in their own quite legitimate, but quite temporal, interests. How meaningless it will all seem in retrospect when the day of golden opportunity is passed, and the only reality left is the judgment seat of Christ! Can we measure our own lives and activities by this unsparing yardstick, and be content?

The comfort of the picture lies in the fact that even the apostolic times were "a day of small things." It was a very restricted and family affair. "My son Timothy . . . *I have no one else to send* . . ."

But still the apostle is not discouraged or cast down—

"Finally, my brethren (3:1), rejoice in the Lord."

Again he returns to his basic theme of rejoicing, which nothing can quench. The aged and forsaken prisoner is encouraging those who are younger, at liberty, and have the advantage of

ecclesial companionship. But it was fitting, for he possessed in much fuller measure than they the one real, never-failing source of joy—the vivid awareness of the power of the love of Christ.

The word translated "*Finally*" literally means "*remainder*," and the sense is, "This, then, remains . . ." He uses the same word again in ch. 4, "*Finally*, whatsoever things are true, etc." This word is translated "Henceforth" in the expression, "*Henceforth* there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." *This remains*, in spite of all passing sorrow—"Rejoice in the Lord."

V. 3—"We worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

"Worship God, and rejoice in Christ." The closer we come to that as our fixed and habitual frame of mind, the closer we are to the mind of the Spirit, which is life and peace.

"Have no confidence in the flesh." This is infinitely far-reaching. Jesus said: "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." Paul had done just that, as he goes on to say, and he had done it gladly—even eagerly.

All that had made up his former life of satisfaction and pride, he had cast aside. He saw the emptiness and falseness and unsoundness of it all. The mind of the flesh seeks self-expression and self-gratification in a 1000 different, subtle ways—many of them apparently righteous, noble and good, but *pride* is at the bottom of them all. We *must* see through it. We must abhor every ugly impulse of self-assertion and self-esteem. We must empty ourselves of self, and be overwhelmed with our utter insignificance.

"What is man, that Thou, O God, art mindful of him?"—pitiful specks of briefly animated dust in the immeasurable vastness of eternity. Who are we to even think we have a thought worth thinking? "Worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ, and have no confidence in the flesh."

"I count all things but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him; that I may **know** him, and the **power** of his resurrection, and the **fellowship** of his sufferings—if by **any means** I might attain!"

Surely we can but sadly smile when some speak disparagingly of "extremists" in the race for life. How pale the most extreme would appear before the intensity of the apostle's fervent strivings and desire!

"In stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft . . . beaten with rods, stoned, scourged with whips . . . weariness, painfulness, watchings, hunger, thirst, cold, nakedness . . ."

And yet he says (vs. 13-17)—

"I count not myself to have attained . . . I strive that if by any means I **might** attain . . . I **press** toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus . . . Brethren, **be followers of me**."

And then he goes on in sadness (vs. 18-19) to speak of those who walked as the enemies of the cross of Christ . . . whose end is destruction . . . whose glory is their shame. . . *who mind earthly things*.

Is it so terrible to "mind earthly things"? Does it call for such extreme condemnation? Houses, lawns, furniture, automobiles, business, what shall we eat? what shall we wear?—all must be attended to in their time and season—but *where is our heart*? What fills our interests? Where does our mind naturally love to turn?—patterns, recipes, needlework, hobbies, workshops, gardens, photographs, recreation, sport? . . . or the *eternal things of God*?

"Set your affections on things above, not on things on earth."

"I count all things but loss . . . I press—I strive—I strain toward the mark . . . if by any means I might attain to the transcendent, eternal glory of oneness with Christ.

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in "Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed-for, my joy and my crown, so stand fast the Lord, my dearly beloved" (4:1).

Does this overflowing manifestation of affection seem to us extreme and overdone? Are we, like the Corinthians, afraid to open our hearts to one another? Are we cold, and reserved, and self-contained? Peter exhorts (1:4:8)—

"ABOVE ALL THINGS, have fervent love among yourselves."

That will solve most problems.

There is nothing ordinary or commonplace about the glorious Gospel of Christ. It means a complete and revolutionary transformation of the heart. It is *all or nothing*.

Then once more (v. 4) comes that exultant refrain—

"Rejoice in the Lord always: and **again** I say, **Rejoice!**"

How eager and anxious he was that they should enjoy the full glory and power of their holy calling—that they should share with him the transporting joy and peace of life in Christ!

V. 5—"Let your moderation"—the word really means 'gentleness' and is so translated in other places—"Let your **gentleness** be known unto all men."

Christ's true brethren will be universally known for their unfailing gentleness in all relationships and circumstances. Gentleness is the manifestation of a calm and spiritual mind—"Be careful for nothing" (v. 6)—let nothing make you anxious or upset—take every problem to God in thanksgiving and prayer.

"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding (v. 7), SHALL keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

He speaks in terms of unshakable assurance. He has no doubts of the unfailing efficacy of his Divine prescription.

"Finally, my brethren, whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report—**think on these things.**"

The practical wisdom of this counsel, even from a natural point of view, is surely obvious. The folly of the opposite course is surely manifest. To keep the mind occupied with thoughts of things that are lovely and pure is not only beneficial and spiritually upbuilding—it is also self-evidently the course of peace and happiness. But, above all, the crowning promise of this way is (v. 9):

"The God of peace shall be with you."

He finds occasion, in conclusion, to rejoice in them again (v. 10)—that their care of him in his affliction had flourished. In the intimacy of his special affection for them, he reminds them (v. 15) that when he was establishing the ecclesias, they alone of all the churches had been concerned to contribute to his daily needs. Philippi was in Macedonia. To the rich Corinthians he said—

"The deep poverty of the ecclesias of Macedonia abounded unto the riches of their liberality . . . beyond their power they were willing . . . praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift."

And later, in ch. 11, he tells the Corinthians that he had accepted nothing from *them*, relying rather on the hard-earned assistance of the Macedonian brethren. He refused the help of the rich, and accepted that of the struggling poor. He refused the help of the Corinthians, he said (2 Cor. 11:12), that he might cut off occasion from them that desired occasion—that he might not give them cause to glory that they had supported him.

How much this tells us of the confidence of his intimacy with the brethren and sisters of Philippi—that he did not hesitate to share the meager resources of their poverty with them! There were no puffing-up, pride-gratifying riches here—no danger that the well-to-do would glory over him that of their abundance they had patronizingly supported this indigent wanderer, among their various charitable hobbies. *Rich Philippians*—powerful in their poverty! *Poor Corinthians*—impotent in their opulence!

Arising out of this consideration, he beautifully reveals to them the secret of his divine peace of mind (vs. 11-13)—

"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and suffer need."

"*I have learned . . . I am instructed.*" It was a state of mind that had to come by a process of learning. Jesus said: "*Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.*" And of the Son of God himself it is recorded, "He *learned* obedience by the things that he suffered."

This word "instructed" in v. 12 means *to be initiated into divine mysteries*. It is the only place it occurs in the Scriptures.

"I can do **all things** through Christ who strengtheneth me" (v. 13).

That was the glorious secret into which he had been initiated, and it must be ours. "When I am weak, then am I strong." When I most fully realize and am impressed with my utter helplessness, then am I most strong through the transforming power of Christ.

V. 20—"Unto God be glory for ever and ever."

This dare not be just a form of words, or an occasional remembrance. "*Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are, and were created*" (Rev. 4:11). Let us keep that before us as a continual perspective of the purpose of our life and walk in the world. Our part in the glorious, unbounded future depends upon whether our lives and characters contribute to the glory and pleasure of God.

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V. 21—"Salute every saint in Christ Jesus."

Not just "*all saints*," but "*every saint*"—each one separately and individually. A beautiful concluding thought—"Salute *every saint* in Christ." Consider them all, over and over, one by one, in loving and prayerful remembrance, after the wonderful example of the aged apostle, that the whole body, fitly joined together according to the effectual working of every part, may grow up in Christ unto the edifying of itself in love.

"*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*" —G.V.G.
