
Rejoice Always



Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. (1 Thess 5:16-24)

When Paul was writing to the church in Thessalonica, “rejoice always” (1 Thess 5:16) he was in a happy mood. He just got news that the first Christian community in Europe was persevering in faith despite persecution. When he wrote to the church in Philippi, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice” (Phil 4:4), he was in prison and the possibility of death was hovering over him. It is easy to be happy when all goes well, but to rejoice in the face of troubles and death is another matter.

The Grammar of Joy

The verb “rejoice” is in imperative mood. We use this mood to give command and orders but also to exhort people to do something. Here, Paul is exhorting the believers who face persecution not to give up faith. Outer circumstances should not take away their inner conviction of finding the truth and salvation. They gave up idol worship and began to serve the true and living God (1 Thess 1:9). The same exhortation Jesus directs at his disciples: “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and

be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt 5:12).

Christmas and joy cannot be separated. The angels announced in the middle of the night to the poor shepherds: “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people” (Lk 2:10). When one believes that Jesus is the light shining in the darkness of our lives, we cannot but rejoice. When one believes that Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promise about the Messiah who brings salvation, justice, and peace on earth, we cannot but rejoice. It does not matter whether we are successful or facing persecution. “Rejoice always” calls us to look beyond and above. It does not depend on what happens to us. It depends on what has happened within us. We do not walk by sight but by faith. “The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). All trials and tribulations will have their end. God’s love lasts forever. He has written our names in the book of the living (Lk 10:20).

Joy Killers

Joy is connected with faith. It is our faith in Jesus that brings joy to us. But, as usual, this joy can be taken away from us. People around us, including well meaning Christians tell us to be 'realistic', which often means to grumble about everything. The world around us tries to persuade us that 'the American dream' is more important than faith. Lastly, our experience and emotions can affect the perception of reality. Seeing so much pain and cruelty on our TV screens we may succumb to a notion that the world is run by the evil one.

Someone who has not experienced life-changing faith in Jesus cannot understand that it is possible to be alone and not lonely, to see trials as a part of life, and welcome death as the beginning of something indescribable. Paul was a Christian nut and so are we. The world, however, wants to laugh us out, to silence, or even destroy us if necessary. As in the past, Herod wanted to kill the child (Matt 2:16-18) and a huge red dragon wanted to devour it (Rev 12:3-4), so

today there are those who are unable to accept and tolerate a true believer. By hook or by crook, they will try to eliminate that 'joy' from their midst

Conclusion

People smile for different reasons and there are different kinds of smiles. There is a listener/response smile that encourages a speaker to continue their story. There is a polite smile that shows on our face when we receive a horrible birthday present. There is a miserable smile that tries to cover our feelings of nervousness and fear. These smiles are frequently 'fake' smiles. But, there is only one smile of true enjoyment that cannot be fake.

Similar thing happens with joy. People are joyful for different reasons. A wedding, a new house, and a new career can bring joy to our lives. But, this kind of joy never lasts. There is only one joy that cannot be taken away and that is the joy of faith in Jesus. He has brought to us the "time of grace" and the "oil of joy" (Is 61:3-4). Rejoice always.

Prayer Intentions

- Let us pray for Christian communities in the world. May our joy give testimony to the presence of God in this world;
- Let us thank God for all the blessing and graces He showered on us in the past week. He is 'Emmanuel' every day of our lives;
- Let us pray for Grace, Cathy, and Emma. May the God Lord protect and support them in their journey through life;
- Let us pray for John who cannot find time for God. Let him realise that He is the source of his lives.
- Let us pray for all preachers who get discouraged with their efforts in proclaiming the Word. Let them not look for people's applause but for God's approval of their work.

May God bless all of you who remember us in prayer and support our ministry here.

New Life Asia Team