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West Valley Presbyterian Church
A Year of Testimony and Praise
Rejoicing in Christ
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If you have been worshiping with us you know that we are in a series on the book of Philippians. And this is a book on joy...and making our mouth rejoice and our heart too.

When Coca-Cola went into China, they were determined to use a symbol that phonetically represented the sounds of their name. It was only after their marketing campaign was a failure that Coke learned that their new symbol translated, '**Bite the wax tadpole.**' It was a huge marketing blunder. Obviously tadpoles and Coca Cola have little in common. No wonder no one was buying their product. When they changed their name to mean, '**May the mouth rejoice,**' they began to do really well.

And this book tells that if we do make our mouth rejoice...we will do really well in our Christian life. That little video you just saw summed up what we have been learning...pretty well... ending on the phrase that I want to talk with you about today in Philippians 4 that says, "**REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS. AGAIN I WILL SAY REJOICE.**"

And Paul is saying here...In your life, make rejoicing an ALWAYS kind of thing.

Not just a sometimes thing...but an ALWAYS thing.

Always rejoice. That seems so hard! We are called to a lifestyle of rejoicing in a grumpy world.

When people shove in line in front of us...Rejoice!

When people at work are demanding and unreasonable...Rejoice!

When our kids are ornery and our spouse preoccupied...Rejoice!

What a challenge!

Something to know when you read scripture, is that any time a phrase is repeated in scripture it is very important. It means that the author

wants you to get the message. It means that this is critical...this is on the final...this is a critical piece of information...sit up and take notice.

So let's sit up and take notice right now and say this phrase together. **"REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS. AGAIN I WILL SAY REJOICE."** In Philippians the word joy or rejoice is used 19 different times! So joy is repeated not just here but all through the book – again and again and again.

Do you have joy? Paul says you need it – Paul says its critical to pay attention to your joy factor.

What does rejoice really mean?

Well, come to find out the word rejoice is a good Presbyterian word. If you are a staunch Presbyterian, have a stiff upper lip, and don't crack a smile too easily, (maybe you have a bit of the Scot in your background)... TAKE HEART! You too can REJOICE. You too can really get into this because this word REJOICE means a quiet kind of confidence, peace and an inner sense of contentment.

We don't jump over the pews in this church, we don't dance in the aisles, we don't stand up and shout Hallelujah and clap tambourines incessantly ...(but any time you feel the spirit moving...you can do that if you want.)

But in general, we are a reserved prudent sort, not taken to loud expressions of emotion or hysteria. So I think this verse was written by Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit primarily with Presbyterians in mind, because even Presbyterians can be joyful...and rejoice 'ALWAYS' if it's a quiet inner thing...cause we're good with that.

Now, let me ask you something. If I were to ask you what the opposite of joy was...what would you say?

Turn to the person next to you, and ask them, what they think the opposite of joy really is.

Did anybody come up with the word "ANXIETY"...cause if you did you are right... the opposite of joy isn't so much sadness its more anxiety...

Here's what Daniel Clenendin author, says in his blog which I think is accurate...he writes the following:

The opposite of joy is not sadness or sorrow but anxiety. Jesus encouraged his followers, "do not worry about your life. . . Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" Consider the joy of the birds in their morning songs, or the flowers in their springtime glory, he said. If the Lord of the universe clothes creation with such extravagance, then we can rejoice in his love regardless of our circumstances. Jesus says rest in God's love "so that my joy may be in you and so that your joy may be complete" (John 15:11).

-- Daniel Clendenin, *Journey With Jesus* blog for January 15, 2007,

I love that.

You see...joy comes from a childlike trust in a good God - whom we have learned is utterly and completely reliable and faithful to his children. He can totally be depended on for all things.

We learn this over and over again in our spiritual walk, and finally after a while I think God hopes that this trust in him, will become embedded into the fiber of our being...and we will be able to actually enjoy our days trusting him rather than fearing...and being constantly anxious about our life

Think of all the things that make us anxious in our culture

The stress of it all.

We get anxious about money, (image)

Our appearance (image)

Our performance (image)

Others motivations (image)

Our schedules being too full, or not full enough (image)

Our kids, our spouses

Our life choices and our past and our future

Then we feel guilty about being anxious

And it only adds to the anxiety that we feel

What if we could let that anxiety go? What if instead of being anxious we could replace it with rejoicing!

But you may say to me , “*Kim, you and St. Paul are caught up in denial.*”
This world is full of pain and injustice, and you are telling me to rejoice not just once...but always?

How can you say that when the world is in the state it is today?

In Paul’s day, how could Paul say “rejoice” when he was in a dark prison cell and the church was being persecuted all around him?

And how can I rejoice when I am constantly surrounded by bad news in the media, and my life isn’t what I had hoped.

Isn’t this “rejoicing in the Lord always” just a way to cope with a situation that is so bad that we can’t look at it anymore and we’ve decided to just be glib? Isn’t this just a kind of Polly-anish denial?

Thoughtful Christians ask these kinds of questions, and they are good reasonable questions, but...

Let me ask *you* something. How many sad, long-faced, dour Christian folks– how many of those kinds of people have actually helped anyone else, or made a difference in our world in any substantial way? I don’t know of any long faced, dour, negative people who have really done a whole lot.

Most of the people that I know have made a difference in Jesus name
Are people with a deep joy and often you can see it in their eyes
People who can look the darkness of this world in the face
And feel the pain, and empathize with the sorry state of affairs here

But people who *also know* that their trust and hope rests not in what they see around them – or what happens *to* them
But rather in who God is...knowing that one day there will be a victory dance

Knowing that one day there will be deliverance

Knowing that one day God will bend down and tenderly wipe away every tear from our eyes and death will be no more.

This is why the people who make the most difference down here, are the people who are most connected up there.

And, ironically, often it is people who are closest to suffering who are filled with the most joy.

People who lived with Mother Teresa said that in the middle of all that suffering, in the depths of Calcutta India, what was remarkable about her was not the way that she kept serving; it was the extraordinary capacity in which she was able to bring joy into every circumstance...to those suffering the most.

David Myers, a Christian psychologist who has written extensively on this subject— wrote a whole book about joy—he notes that it is people who are consistently in negative moods, joyless people, who are most likely to be self-preoccupied, self-absorbed, relationally-withdrawn, least likely to serve, least likely to love. **In experiment after experiment, people who are highest in joy are also the most likely to help people in need.**

In this world, if joy is to exist at all, it will *have to be able* to exist alongside of suffering. And, one of the tests of authentic joy as opposed to cheap, circumstantial happiness or pleasure, is its ability to exist in the midst of pain or suffering...

So again, the loss of joy does not make the world better - and, conversely, refusing joy for the sake of suffering does not help those who suffer.

The contrary is true.

The world needs people who *because they rejoice* in the Lord, thereby derive the courage and impetus to make a difference.

Karl Barth once said:

Joy is a defiant “Nevertheless!” ...Where there is pain and suffering... “Nevertheless I will rejoice.”

Because God is bigger than whatever evil is doing in the world; and the promise is that God has overcome the world.

This reminds me of what Matthew Henry, a Biblical scholar from the 1700's wrote in his diary after some thieves robbed him and took his wallet: **“Let me be thankful first, because I was never robbed before; second, because, although they took my wallet, they did not take my life; third, because, although they took my all, it was not much;**

and fourth, because, it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.”

The only way to have an attitude like this is to release our problems to the Lord. Because He’s in charge we can have joy – no matter what happens. “... James 1:2 challenges us to **“consider it pure joy... whenever you face trials of many kinds.”**

I don’t know what this means for you personally. I really do not know. Tragedies do happen sometimes in our own personal lives, and terrible things do occur that it takes a long time for us to work through. I don’t want to minimize any of that. I am not suggesting that there are quick fixes to those kinds of things.

But just practically speaking, for many of us, on a day to day basis, the lack of joy that we have in our lives, comes most of the time from stupid stuff...nothing like what Paul encountered at all...

As I thought about this I thought of the times when I was a kid growing up...

And so many things would cut my joy off. Just little things – mostly these things were all about me.

- How am I doing in school?
- Are my teachers pleased with me, or are they going to be mad at me?
- What if my parents find out?
- What if I get in trouble?

Just little things....

I look back at those moments and I look back at me and I want to look myself in the eye and say:

- What are you so worried about?
- Why would you let any of that stuff rob you of joy?
- Could you let it go?
- **Why not just choose joy?**

Then...

I think about my life now. And I can still serve these gods that I call joy bashers...in an insidious adult sort of way...

Some of these joy bashers are...

- What Do Other People Think of Me?
- Am I Successful Enough?

- Have I Done Enough?
- Have I Got Enough?
- Am I Secure Enough?

These are cruel gods to serve, and they are joy bashers. And its so sad that we spend so much of our time worrying about these things, because friends, we were made for joy. That's what we were created for.

And God is saying

Why would you let these things rob you of the joy of my presence?

Could you let it go?

Why not choose joy, right now, today? Why not rejoice? You only have today!

The past is gone, and the future unknown.

Rejoice! I love you! I have overcome the world. Be of good cheer!

C.S. Lewis put it like this:

Joy is the serious business of heaven.

Probably the single most famous statement from our heritage as a Presbyterian Church is this line:

The chief end of human beings is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Dallas Willard says, **God is the most joyful being in the universe.** That's why Paul says:

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice.

Don't miss out on joy folks. Don't miss out.

Lew Smedes wrote:

To miss out on joy is to miss out on the reason for your existence.

Joy is pretty critical isn't it? No wonder Paul repeats it so many times.

So what do I need to do to learn how to REJOICE in the Lord just a little bit more?

Well, we've got to clear out the clutter of worry, anxiety, complaining and a dark outlook on things, so there's some room for joy. And...

Joy is a great risk. It requires me letting go of complaining, putting myself down, blaming others or circumstances, criticizing things because they are not perfect, demanding that I solve every problem, etc.

And the truth is I can't make myself be joyful.. I

can't make myself be joyful, but I can learn to abide in a God, who is a

joyful being and in whom there is no worry or anxiety..

I can begin to rest more in him, and tune in more to his presence... And one of the ways that I abide in God's joy is I concentrate on my world and my life as God's gift to me, and I express gratitude and delight in that.

So...I want us all to try something. As a kind of a spiritual discipline.

Tomorrow (on Monday), WVPC, lets all go on a one-day fast
Usually when you think of a fast, you think of abstaining from food for a day or two

But what I want us to do is to fast
from complaining and worrying that creates anxiety. Okay?
Just for one day. Just for tomorrow.

(Yesterday...backpack story...with Rosie)

So just for one day we are going to release our worry and tension and anxiety and choose joy and rejoicing instead....OK???

See how long you can make it...I'd be interested to know
When you wake up in the morning until you go to sleep at night...one entire day, no grumbling. No whining. No complaining. No worrying. Not a single negative word.
Not about your body or your money or your food or your relatives or your boss, about the spouse you don't have,
about the spouse you do have.

No complaining or worry all day long.

Instead, when you feel like complaining, replace it with rejoicing.

Say something like "Lord! Thank you for this day that I am alive."

"Praise you Lord, for your goodness, your faithfulness, and for your love."

"I rejoice Lord, and I praise you for this person, that usually gets on my nerves, but that today I have decided to pray for instead of complain about."

Or "My kids...they may be driving me crazy...but thank you for them. I rejoice because you've given them to me."

Do you get it?

Make an intentional effort to remember what is good about your life; and how wonderful Jesus is in the midst of your day.

Ask God to help you make it through... We really do need to depend on God for this one. This is going to be a challenge for many of us...especially me, cause I can be an Eeyore at times..

(Monday).

How many of you are game for taking this one day fast from worry and anxiety on? Okay.

How many of you think it's a dumb idea, and you want to complain to me after the service about it that you don't like it cause its worrying you and making you anxious?

All right. As I said I am going to be doing this right along with you tomorrow...this will be an all church spiritual event...

We're going to give it a shot, find out how hard this is...and then maybe begin to recognize a bit more how we can shift our focus, so that we can truly become people who "Rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS" not just sometimes...or when everything is going right...but ALWAYS...

Let's Pray...

You who are pure joy, and you who delight in us and long for us to trust you...have mercy on us in our small mindedness that pulls us so easily into worry and anxiety. We cannot add an inch to our height, or a day to our lives by worry and anxiety. Forgive us Lord for thinking that on our own we can somehow control the course of events and create a life of meaning and fulfillment. We need **you** to do this for us, and we need to immerse ourselves in your presence – you who are the most joyful being in the universe. Give us enough faith in your steadfast love, so that we can rejoice. Allow us to live this day, and this day only – its all we've got – in the joy of your presence. Lord right now...in this moment...we lay our lives before you and we intentionally ask you to take our burdens...we release them to you...and trust you with our lives...We rejoice that you are God and we rejoice that no matter what happens to us you hold us, you love us, and you have overcome the world.