

Rejoice! God loves you and you are one of his children because of the faith in you heart. Amen.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. **This is God's Word.**

Dear Recipients of God's grace, mercy and love,

As I have watched the news and read various articles, joy has been absent from the reports and I have to admit I haven't had a lot of joyful thoughts either but that is why I have decided to share this sermon text with you this morning I need to hear God encourage me **"To be Joyful in All Circumstances."** We all need to let God's Word bring us a, **"Gentle Joy," "A Prayerful Joy,"** and **"A Peaceful Joy."**

I. "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" Two simple sentences but they say an awful lot. Paul is telling us to rejoice because of the influence the Lord has had in our lives. Matter of fact, having God in our lives changes everything. We once were under a sentence of death because of our sins but now we live with the gift of life because the Holy Spirit has given us faith. Our sins are forgiven and the slate is wiped clean. And because we are children of God we have brothers and sisters in Christ to encourage us and to pray for us. What a wonderful blessing God gives us and so we can't help but to rejoice – to rejoice in all the Lord has done and continues to do for us.

But what do we do when our business shuts down and we don't have a job, or we go to the store and everything on our list is gone. And we love our kids but being at home with them all week can be a challenge as well. Or maybe you live alone and now you can't or don't want to go out and do what you have normally done and your dealing with loneliness and depression. How can we still rejoice?

This hasn't been an easy time for pastors either. We have been called to serve God's people and now we have to decide whether to continue to keep the church open to share God's Word in person which we all need or to close the church so as to not risk harm to our members by our gathering. How can we still rejoice?

Paul tells us, **"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near."** As I think about that question, **"How can I rejoice?"** I want to focus in on the last sentence of verse 4, **"The Lord is near."** We talk about faith and how God is in control and how he will be with us and watch over us and help us, and that is all true, but now is the time for our test. In the midst of all that is going on do we believe and trust that God is watching over us?

Yes! The Lord is near. My Bible sits next to me on my desk and I have had conversations with other pastors by email and the internet sharing ideas and scripture and encouraging one

another. I have searched through the Bible on my desk and also used a Bible program I have and in this way I have listened to the Lord through his Word and he has not let me down.

Psalm 46 has always been a favorite psalm of mine, maybe because Psalm 46:1 is my confirmation verses but it has reminded me every day this week that the Lord is my Refuge and strength and I shouldn't worry but rather be still and know that God is in control. Psalm 121 has reminded me that God won't let me stumble or fall but he will constantly watch over me. God speaks to us through his Word to calm our fears and to bring us comfort. And so, just as I have gone to my Bible more often this week, I would encourage you to do the same and marvel at the love of our Savior.

This Lenten season, the theme of our midweek services has been about Jesus, our Savior, going forth to do battle for us. And he did. He defeated Satan as he paid for the sins of the world on the cross. Christ took our place and did what we can't do, but that is how great his love for us is and even though it seems like Satan is having a hay day, God has defeated him and God is in control and will limit the chaos in our world. The Lord is near to you as well.

And so, as you listen to God speak to you through his Word Paul also tells us, **“⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all.”** Call your friends and talk to them – encourage them and assure them that God is watching over them as well. Remind them that Jesus went to the cross to suffer and die for our sins and if he loves us that much he will continue to watch over us and care for us. Yet, it is still hard not to be anxious at times and so Paul continues to encourage us:

II. He tells us, **“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”** How do you get rid of anxiety? Talk to someone. Paul suggests that we talk to God – that we lay all of our anxieties; all those things that are bothering us and causing us to worry – take those things and lay them at God's feet – present them to God in prayer. Leave the solution up to God because he really knows more than any of us. Even when we are presenting our problems to him always keep in mind that we don't need to tell God how to solve our problem – he already knows the best way. We just need to tell him about them and to ask him to take care of it or to lead us to the best solution.

And remember that prayer is a heart to heart talk with God so don't forget to listen to God talk to you. He does that through his Word, so pick up your Bible or read or listen to a daily devotion. So many times people make their conversation with God one-sided and can't figure out why he isn't answering their prayer. Maybe he is but we are not looking in the right place for the answer.

Talk to God and listen to him and he can and will remove any anxiety from your heart and that will bring you a peace and contentment that you can certainly rejoice in.

III. **“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”** We talk about the “peace of God,” but what is it? This is a peace that comes from God that is found solely in those who are justified by faith. This is a peace we have that God pours into the souls of his believers who have laid their problems and cares

and worries at his feet and that trust that he will take care of them. This is a peace that exceeds any understanding of God that we have and it excels beyond our expectations.

The hard part about receiving this peace is that we don't always trust God and his Word. We say that we trust in God but then we think we have to do it all and we really are falling back on ourselves. When you were a child you trusted in your parents – well we are children of God and he wants us to trust in him in the same way. A simple trust that he can lead us down a path out of our problems and fill our heart with peace and contentment.

That is all possible because Jesus traveled the path to the cross for us. Jesus was perfect in our place as he traveled that path for us and he took our problems – our sins on himself and suffered the punishment for us so we can have peace.

This world isn't a perfect place and we aren't perfect either and it seems we are being reminded of that even more by this pandemic. But as Paul reminds us – because we are in Christ – because he lives in us – because the Lord is near – he has made us perfect and he brings us perfect peace.

So rejoice – rejoice in the Lord always. Don't be anxious about anything, but in everything talk to God.

Let your faith be evident as you deal with things day-by-day and talk to your neighbors and friends. Encourage them and let them encourage you. God is in control. God loves you. Trust in him. Amen.