

**This is the Day the Lord has made, Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.**

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,<sup>19</sup> because I know that this will turn out for my deliverance, through your prayer and the support of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.<sup>20</sup> This matches my earnest expectation and hope that I will in no way be put to shame, but with all boldness, as always, so even now, Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.<sup>21</sup> Yes, for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.<sup>22</sup> But if I am to go on living in the flesh, that will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet which should I prefer? I do not know.<sup>23</sup> I am pulled in two directions, because I have the desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.<sup>24</sup> But, it is more necessary for your sake that I remain in the flesh.<sup>25</sup> And since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and will continue with all of you, for your progress and joy in the faith.<sup>26</sup> And so by my coming to you again, my goal is to give you even more reason to boast in Christ Jesus. **This is God's Word for God's people.**

**Dear Friends,**

There was a man who lived thousands of years ago. The people in the land were very wicked at the time and worshipped false gods. They built altars to these false gods and made sacrifices to them and had quite a large following. This man of God had a showdown with the priests of the false god and ended up defeating them by showing them how God can do the impossible. The 450 false priests were then seized by the people and put to death receiving the judgment that comes as a result of unbelief. This was a great victory for God's prophet and yet, rather than celebrate he had to flee into the desert because the king and queen were upset because he had killed their prophets and they vowed to take his life.

God's prophet was Elijah and as he pondered the threat on his life he asked God to take his life now because he felt he was all alone in the world. He felt his work wasn't doing any good and so he just wanted God to end his life on this earth. God didn't grant his wish right away. He still had work for Elijah which included calling the prophet that would take his place. After Elijah had done all that God had appointed for him to do, God answered Elijah's prayer and took him home to heaven.

In some ways the Apostle Paul struggled with the same things Elijah did. He was persecuted for the message he preached and at the time he wrote the words before us, he was in jail. One big difference between Paul and Elijah can be seen in the words of Paul, **"I will continue to rejoice."** Paul was always rejoicing but in this portion of scripture he was rejoicing for two particular reasons. First he was rejoicing because he was living his life for Christ and then secondly, he was rejoicing because he was looking forward to living his life with Christ in heaven.

We too have the same reasons to rejoice as we live our lives for Christ here on this earth and as we look forward to living our lives with Christ in heaven.

**I.** Paul was rejoicing even though he was in prison, had been beaten many times, persecuted and rejected – he was rejoicing. He had a lot of reasons to rejoice. The greatest reason was that the Gospel was continuing to be proclaimed. The Gospel gave Paul reason to rejoice. It had

literally changed his life from the life of an unbeliever who was trying to work his way to heaven to a life of a Christian who completely trusted in Jesus as the only way to heaven. That “Good News” of the Gospel continued to be proclaimed by Paul and by the Philippians to whom he was writing.

Paul was probably chained to two Roman guards – one on each side. As people came to visit Paul and as he probably dictated correspondence to those who helped him write, the guards heard what was going on. In this way they heard the Gospel message. The guards worked in shifts. In just a few weeks the whole company of Roman soldiers tasked with watching Paul had heard about Jesus. They heard about how he had suffered on the cross for the sins of the world and how he had risen victorious on Easter morning to proclaim victory over sin, death and the devil for us. We take that message for granted because we have heard it so often but for the guards – this was a life saving message.

Paul rejoiced because he was able to proclaim this message as he lived his life for Christ. To help us understand what it means to live our lives for Christ Paul gives us a few examples. He encourages us to rejoice always just as he was doing. He notes how the Philippians were praying for him and that gave him strength as he continued to live his life for Christ. That is sound advice for us also – to pray for our fellow Christians and the opportunities to spread the Gospel. He noted that faith produces fruitful labor.

By fruitful labor Paul is pointing out that we have to work at living our lives for Christ but as we do that Christ will bless our efforts – they will be fruitful. We labor for Christ with the spiritual gifts he gives us. These aren't the same for everyone and may change over time. You might be a builder, a mom or dad sharing Jesus with your children, maybe you have a sympathetic ear, we all are able to pray, some of us can teach, or have a car to help transport people or visit. There are many ways in which we are able to serve the Lord. Sometimes it is with the words we speak but at other times it can be the actions we take in our lives. But in all these different ways, Paul encourages us to, **“Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”** Live your lives for Christ, giving all glory to Christ in all you do.

The temptation we have is to hear these words and forget them or think that is good for someone else to do. If we think that way, nothing happens and after a while we forget about rejoicing in the Lord. But if we not only hear God's Word but do what it says – living our Lives for Christ – then we will have all the reason to continue to rejoice. Because as we live our lives for Christ we are reminded of all that he has done for us and we will look forward to living our lives with Christ when he decides to call us home to heaven.

**II.** That is something Paul looked forward to, **“I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.”** Jesus said, **“In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”** (John 14:2-4) In heaven we will be in the presence of our Lord and Savior. We will see him personally and feel his glory in a way we can't feel it here on this earth because in heaven we will be without sin and the sinful influences of the world we live in. That is better by far.

Paul said if he had to chose between living for Christ here on this earth and living with Christ in heaven he doesn't know which one he would chose. Heaven is better by far but Paul also knew that God had plans for him on this earth and the key to Paul's happiness was to have Christ in his life. He couldn't imagine life without Christ.

The key to our happiness is also to have Christ in our lives. A Lot of times we resist that thought. We think we know better. Some of the influences of the world bring us pleasure for a short period of time but in many cases cause us trouble as they lead us away from God.

God's Word helps us in so many ways – assuring us of our salvation, guiding us in Christian living and helping us to make God pleasing decisions. We are only on this earth for a short period of time and then we will look forward to departing and being with Christ forever. God is the one who decides when that time will come. God is the one who will decide when we will gain heaven. Not because of what we have done but because of all that Christ has done for us.

It is the gift of salvation our Savior won for us on the cross that moves us to want to live our lives for Christ while we wait to live our lives with Christ. Until that time comes, let's continue to keep Christ at the center of our lives and in that way we will find it easy to rejoice in the Lord. Amen.