



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

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Philippians 4:4 "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"

Philippians has been called the "rejoicing" book of the N.T. The words 'joy' or 'rejoice' are found 14 times in this short book. The interesting contrast is that Paul is writing this book from a Roman prison and he wants the Philippians to have the same joy that he does.

There are some things we need to remember.

First, joy and happiness are not the same. Happiness is based upon what happens. That's where the word comes from. It is based upon circumstances and is our reaction to things around us. Joy is a choice that is internal and not based upon external circumstances. This is why an apostle in a Roman prison could talk about his joy.

Second, happiness is short lived. We are happy for short moments. Joy is a state of blessing. We are joyous because of who we are in the Lord. Joy tends to be more lasting and makes us more content. The kids sing in VBS, "I've got the joy, joy, joy down in my heart. Where? Down in my heart." Joy runs deep and brings peace and satisfaction. Because a person doesn't have a smile on their face is no indication that joy is lacking. However, a spirit that is always complaining, always negative, always seeing the wrong side of things, may very well be lacking joy. The joyous heart has counted it's blessings and is thankful. The joyous heart knows that he is forgiven, Heaven bound and walking with the Lord.

It is a blessing to be around joyous people. They have a special way of helping you remember what you have overlooked. In the darkest moments, they find the sunshine of Christ. They have a special way of encouraging and motivating us when all seems lost. They are doing things that we know we ought to be doing. Their prayers are filled with thankfulness to the Lord. They are so happy to be a part of a congregation. They love everything about worship. They love the singing. They love the preaching. They feel the prayers are so rich and deep. They love the people.

And, sometimes we stand there thinking, 'I didn't like the preaching today.' Or, 'I thought the singing was slow today.' Yet, here is this joyous disciple, so thankful and so glad to be able to worship with others today. It makes us hold our head down. It make us wonder, what are they seeing that I am missing?

(OVER)

The singing may have been slow, but they were so thankful to be singing to the Lord. I read an interesting story the other day. A man told his preacher that he was leaving and not coming back to that church. All through worship he saw people playing with their phones, some were sleeping, others were chit-chatting or in and out multiple times. No one seemed to care. He was fed up and he was through with that place. The preacher begged the man to do one final thing before he left. He asked him to fill a glass of water to the top and to walk around the auditorium one time. The man carefully did that. The preacher asked him how many people were on their phones? He didn't know. How many were sleeping? He didn't know. Why, asked the preacher. He said that he was watching and focused on the water in the glass that he couldn't see all the others. With that, the preacher talked to him about being focused upon the Lord. When our eyes are intently watching the Lord, we can't see what others were doing. The man stayed.

Consider some things that we ought to be joyful about.

First, we are Christians. That's huge. God took us in when we weren't at our best. He didn't look at us like football teams when it comes to draft day. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. God includes us. God has adopted us. God has named us as His children. God has granted us the inheritance. Words cannot describe what all that means.

Second, we are engaged in the greatest work the world has ever known. Man has been involved in some amazing things. Massive bridges have spanned large bodies of water. Rockets have blasted deep into space. Man has been able to transplant organs into another body. Huge wars have ended as leaders signed treaties of peace. The blind have been able to read because of brail. It is amazing all the accomplishments that man has made. Yet, the greatest work, one of the longest works, is the building of the kingdom of God. The Lord allows you and I to be a part of this work. It is His kingdom. And the work must be done His way. But what a blessing that God trusts us with this. He has put His perfect word about His perfect Son into our imperfect hands. He has allowed us to use His word to change lives and give hope to people who have run out of hope. Our greatest work is not getting to our jobs, but it is being lights for Jesus. It is living as disciples of Him. The first place many will ever see God is in our lives. Our words, our work, our attitudes can be the very bridges that people cross to learn Jesus. People that would have been lost eternally, are turned and saved and their families are saved because of what God has allowed you and I to do. Rejoice.

Third, where we are headed. We are Heaven bound. Heaven is our home and our destination. His home, one day, becomes our home. How blessed and how thankful we are for that. It won't be a weekend tour. It won't be a quick walk through. The destination, our journey, ends not at the cemetery, but in the home of God. There we will be forever. There we will be with no other place to go. There we will be with all the righteous of all time. Heaven isn't owed to us. We don't deserve it. We don't earn it. It's God's promise and gift. No matter what happens today. No matter how bleak things are here. No matter how tough things are, someday all of this will be behind us and we will be with the Lord. It simply will not matter then. Once we are there, all will be fine.

Rejoice! We are the most blessed people! We have an enormous job to be busy doing! We have a destination that is truly out of this world. Rejoice.

Roger Shouse (Used by permission)
