



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!"

This is one of the most popular verses in Philippians. Everyone loves this verse. You find it posted on Facebook, cross stitched on pillows and printed in greeting cards. However, many get this verse wrong. The apostle is not saying, "be happy." Just be happy, is the creed of our culture. Do whatever it takes to be happy, just be happy. That thought, just be happy, has led many to walk away from marriages, it is used to justify immoral behavior and has caused far too many to feel safe and secure because they are happy.

Paul says, "rejoice," and it's not open ended. I can rejoice if someone puts a box of chocolate on my desk. I'd rejoice if my Dodgers were playing in the World Series this year, but they are not. Rejoice, not be happy. And, it's not just rejoice, but "rejoice in the Lord." This is a spiritual connection. Chocolates have nothing to do with the Lord. Playing a baseball game is not "in the Lord."

The rejoicing in the Lord is built upon our salvation through Jesus. Rejoicing in the Lord is not about paychecks, vacations, ballgames on TV, but kingdom, righteousness, hope and promises in Jesus. That's the point of the rejoicing.

The life of Paul fully illustrates this concept.

First, Paul kept a heavenly view of life. In the first chapter of Philippians, he understood that it was far better for him to depart and be with the Lord. To "depart" would mean "to die." Being with Jesus and that heavenly view, kept Paul focused upon what is really important and what really matters. Set your mind on things above is what Paul told the Colossians. The heavenly mindset will keep one going and focused even in the worst of circumstances, such as jail, as Paul experienced.

Second, Paul included godly people in his life. This is paramount to our rejoicing. The world can pull our spirits down. The world is negative and toxic. Surrounding our day with such people will only hurt our souls. There was Paul and Barnabas, the encourager. There was Paul and Timothy, his son in the faith. There was Paul and Titus, the refresher of his soul. Quality people. Righteous people. It's a lot easier to rejoice when you have the right people in your life. It's a lot easier to stay on course when you are receiving encouragement, instruction and hope from those who are also Heaven bound.

(OVER)

Third, Paul did not let the past destroy him. He had a past. We all do. And, with all of us, it's not pretty. There were things said, that should never have been said. There were things done that we wish we could undo. For Paul, he sat out to destroy Christianity. He chased down brethren and had them locked up in prison. His past forgiven, he still carried the scars and the memories. And, that's enough for some to sit on the sidelines of life and declare that they are not worthy of anything good. Paul was not like that. His passion that was once against Christ, turned and was for Christ. He did not allow the past to destroy him.

Fourth, Paul was set to finish his spiritual journey. We remember well in Timothy, "I have fought...I have kept...I have finished." (**2 Tim. 4:6-8**) There isn't much rejoicing for the one who quit. There isn't much to feel good about when one has dropped the ball, turned his back, and let others down. Paul stayed with it. Paul could rejoice. Even in a prison, he could tell those on the outside, "rejoice in the Lord."

Now, there is so much doom and gloom these days. Prices are high. Shelves are empty. The country seems to be crazy at the moment. In so many places, the church is struggling and even dwindling. One could sure get the impression that Satan is winning these days. In some sections, especially in many larger cities, it looks like the church is drifting into the dark ages. How easy we could conclude, "just not much to rejoice about these days." That's true when you look around us. There are many things that are wrong.

However, when you look to the Lord, there is much to rejoice. God hasn't abandoned us. God hasn't changed his promises. God hasn't given up on us. Heaven is still there and God is still on the throne. Kingdoms come and go, but God is still there. Hard times pass, and God is still there. Sin becomes popular but God is still there.

Rejoice in the Lord. Rejoice in the Lord always. This world is not our home. Someday, before long, we will be in the land where the roses never fade.

Hold you head up...get down to the church building to worship...and REJOICE.

Roger shouse (Used by Permission)
