‘Rejoicing when things are tough’ 11 October 2026

'Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.' (Philippians 4:4-6)

The 16th Cent. French philosopher, Michel de Montaigne once wrote:

‘Rejoice in the things that are present; all else is beyond thee.’

Is he right? One might have to say that surveying the newsfeeds coming into our digital world today, there is not much to rejoice about. Indeed, daily, things seem to be getting worse. Montaigne though did say: ‘Rejoice in the things that are present’.

That is, the things that are not of the world, but the things that hold truth for you; the things that bring you joy in the moment; the things that bring to your life a sense of meaning. ‘Rejoice in the things that are present’, because you have no control over anything else external to you that are in the sway of others. In this, Montaigne reflects that which the apostle, Paul, tells us in our reading 1500 years earlier. Paul says:

'Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice.’

Clearly, rejoicing in the Lord is also something that was very important to Paul, but this is so easy to say! What if our lives and the things we live through don’t make us happy? Here, we make our greatest mistake in equating rejoicing with happiness. Rejoicing is not only about the times when we are happy.

True rejoicing takes its greatest joy when things are not going well and yet we still have cause to give thanks, to hope, to find the inner strength to pull us through the most difficult of times. Let us recall why Paul might have good reason for not being so positive, in order to understand why he is so positive, with this from 2 Corinthians 11:24-28:

‘Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one (it was considered that 40 lashes would be too much for a man).
Three times I was beaten with rods.
Once I was stoned.
Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.
And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.’

You would think having experienced all that, Paul would have been properly fed up. I dare say during these experiences, rejoicing with a permanent smile was not something he was doing. This though, is the sort of rejoicing of which Paul entreats

us to take hold of and not necessarily about things that make us happy. It is about making a connection between our life experiences and our life in a lively relationship with God, through the Lord Jesus Christ and continuing to trust that God will see us through.

Paul would have agreed with Abraham Lincoln, who said:

‘We can complain because rose bushes have thorns, or rejoice because thorn bushes have roses.’

Have we gone through a hard time, has something terrible happened to us? Then share your rejoicing with God for his presence with you during the trial and again when it is at an end, that he has pulled you through it, despite the terror.

Is it a time when you are bursting with happiness? Then don’t keep this to yourself, thank the Lord for the blessing you have received.

It is in rejoicing whenever the opportunity presents itself that allows us to understand that we are not living our life on this earth alone. If we are able to share our experiences with God, whether they are good or not so good, we suddenly find ourselves in a state of constant prayer and praise.

Whatever we are doing, present it to God in prayer before and after; and don’t forget to pray for God’s help before and bring the result of our labours to him after. This should be so, especially when we are tested, we should do the same and thank him for bringing us through the test. The Lord Jesus never promised us an easy life; why should he have; his was not easy either.

So, when hardship comes, we should expect it and pray for the steely determination to see it through. For when we approach the end of our life here, if we have properly understood the gospel we have received, we should look forward with a lively confidence to overcoming the final barrier between ourselves and our Lord, our death; because this is what our Lord promised us, that trusting in him we would not die, but come home rejoicing for an eternity.

I am convinced this is true. In my life, the Lord has been kind to me, but my life has not been without trial and testing and yet I still look forward to the day when I will meet my saviour. For when all else is said and done, the grace and glory he extends to those who love him surpasses anything we will have ever experienced, such is his faithfulness and his love toward us.

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