



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for August 22, 2010
Released on Wednesday, August 18, 2010**

"Growing in Joy and Peace"

Lesson Text: Philippians 4:2-14

Background Scripture: Philippians 4

Devotional Reading: Psalm 85:4-13

Philippians 4:1-14

2 I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.

3 And I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellow laborers, whose names are in the book of life.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.

5 Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

9 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.

11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

12 I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

14 Notwithstanding, ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction.

TODAY'S AIM

Facts: to study Paul's concern that the Philippians be united and have thought patterns that would steer them away from apprehension.

Principle: to see that God wants the believer to replace worry with trust.

Application: to encourage Christians to put their confidence in our sovereign Lord when challenged by life's problems.

HOW TO SAY IT

CLEMENT. *Kleh*-munt.

EUODIAS. You-*o*-dee-us.

SYNTYCHE. *Sin*-tih-key.

INTRODUCTION

Joy vs. Happiness

Is it possible to be too happy? This may seem like a silly question, but it speaks to the heart of what drives much of our society today. We are forever engaged in Thomas Jefferson's elusive "pursuit of happiness." The problem is in determining what makes us happy and at what cost. If more and better possessions make us happy, is it worth it to work three jobs in order to afford them? If deep personal relationships make us happy, what will we do when they end? If winning in competition makes us happy, how can we survive losing?

Some writers today, both religious and secular, question this all-consuming focus on happiness. It is argued that a well-rounded person is one who experiences pain as well as happiness. These writers claim that there is value in melancholy, strength in sadness. Jesus himself pronounced a blessing on those who mourn (Matthew 5:4).

In today's text Paul exhorts the readers to rejoice continually. This presents us with a conundrum if we equate joy with happiness. How can I be happy when I am unhappy? Am I just supposed to fake being happy all the time? Should I paint a smile on my face or wear a mask? This misses the important point that happiness and joy are not the same thing. Joy is not a fleeting and easily manipulated emotion. Joy is hopeful, deep-seated confidence in our existence as children of God. Joy is a positive look at the present because we know our future is secure through faith in Christ. Joy is based on never having to doubt the acceptance of a loving and caring heavenly Father. We may not always be happy. In fact, it is unreasonable and unhealthy to expect to be happy all the time. But we may always rejoice, even in the darkest experiences of our lives.

INTROMISSION

God provides Christians with His joy and peace. The continued deepening of these qualities is a distinctive mark of Christian commitment. We can experience His joy and peace in every area of our lives.

Christians need to be careful that peace and joy are not lost through disunity. Disharmony among fellow workers in the gospel of Christ can rob God's people of their inward joy and peace, as well as outward tranquillity.

Christians can rejoice in the Lord at all times because of who He is and due to His provision for us regardless of our situation in life at any one time. Appropriate behavior also contributes to the joy and peace Christians may experience. This includes acting in a big-hearted manner toward others, avoiding worry by approaching God in prayer, and pondering those virtues that affect behavior. Paul has given us instruction on these matters and modeled appropriate behavior for us.

Joy and peace are also to be found in sharing with fellow workers in their needs and afflictions. It is right and proper to share in common cause with them in their need.

JOY AND PEACE IN UNITY (Philippians 4:2,3)

1. What was Euodias and Syntyche's relationship with Paul (Philippians 4:2,3)?

Paul spoke directly to two prominent women in the church, Euodias and Syntyche, who were at odds with each other. This feud is ironic given the meanings of the women's names. *Euodias* means "pleasant journey" and has the connotation of "success." *Syntyche* means "good fortune" and also has the connotation of "success." In this case, two successes apparently have collided! These women have positive, optimistic names that mean nearly the same thing, yet they are being dragged down by an unspecified dispute. Significantly, Paul does not try to resolve the disagreement, but exhorts them to work it out themselves. This can be done only, if they remember that they are Christian sisters and find agreement *in the Lord*.

Paul enlists the help of an unnamed Philippian church leader, described only as a "true yokefellow" (v. 3). This is a metaphor drawn from the world of working animals in which two oxen or horses might be joined by a common yoke. Paul sees this leader as in complete harmony with himself. No doubt he also wants this analogy to be extended to the disputing women, so that they might begin to work together.

Paul gives a partial reason for his concern. These women, along with a man named *Clement*, have been *fellow laborers*, coworkers with Paul *in the gospel*, evangelizing their community. Paul is not taking sides here, for he loves all of them. These are not false believers or outsiders who have infiltrated the church. They are Paul's brothers and sisters in Christ, Christians with their eternal destiny secured by faith, believers with their *names* in the *book of life* (see Revelation 20:12).

JOY AND PEACE IN BEHAVIOR (Philippians 4:4-9)

2. How can Christians always rejoice in the Lord (v. 4)?

Paul turned to other matters with several exhortations. First, believers are to "re-joyce in the Lord." Paul had earlier exhorted them to rejoice in the Lord (2:17,18). His encouragement was not to be happy but to rejoice.

There are circumstances that do not bring happiness. The Philippians had reasons to be unhappy. They had to face adversaries (Phil. 1:28,29; 3:2). Paul, their spiritual mentor, was in prison, possibly facing death (1:13,15,23). Yet he told them to rejoice in spite of the circumstances.

Paul said to rejoice always. Christians can be joyful even when it seems that we are encompassed by darkness and feel dreary within. Joy does not depend on our changing circumstances. When our focus is on the Lord and His grace and not on our circumstances or felt needs, we can rejoice in the Lord.

The Lord gives us constant reasons for rejoicing. He never changes (Jas. 1:17). He will never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5,6). God bears our burdens and blesses us (Ps. 68:19) even in the midst of heartache, suffering, or disappointment. The Holy Spirit helps us rejoice, for joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). To rejoice always is not an unrealistic expectation from the Lord.

Paul's own external circumstances at the time did not lend themselves to happiness. Yet he still had reasons to rejoice in the Lord. He rejoiced that he could be a sacrifice for the sake of others (Phil. 2:17,18). The Philippians were a continuing joy to him (4:1). Christ would supply all his needs (vs. 11-13). You too, like Paul, can rest assured that God "who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6).

3. Paul was able to rejoice in all of his circumstances. What can we legitimately rejoice about during difficult times? How does it help to know that God is going to use everything that happens to us for his glory?

Usually when we're in the midst of a hardship, it's difficult to see how God is at work. Usually we have to wait until the trial is over to see how God used it in our lives. But we can be assured that God will use every aspect of the trial, whether it resulted from circumstances beyond our control, or even as a result of our sin or mistakes. That assurance will help us remain faithful even in our pain.

4. What is meant by the word "moderation" (v. 5)?

Paul exhorted believers to be gentle. The word "moderation" can be translated "forbearance," "gentleness," or "consideration." The word connotes acting graciously toward other people. Being gentle is showing a big-hearted attitude wherever possible without violating any biblical principle. A gentle spirit is the opposite of a quarrelsome spirit.

An incentive for Paul's exhortations was that the Lord was coming back. Christ's return is near. His return for the church is imminent, meaning it could occur at any moment (Jas. 5:8). When the Lord returns, He should find us ready and occupied with doing His will. Paul anticipated Christ's return as possibly occurring during his own lifetime (cf. 1 Thess. 4:17).

5. How does prayer, and the peace of God serve as a guard for believers (vs. 6,7)?

Paul admonished believers not to worry. We are to "be careful for nothing." This is not an invitation to carelessness. The old English expression "*be careful*" has the sense of being overwhelmed with cares. We should understand this as a way of saying "do not worry or be anxious about anything." The admonition covers (but is not limited to) worry about food, clothing, length of life, and the future. We lose our focus when we begin to worry and pile concerns on ourselves. We must release our cares to the Lord (1 Peter 5:7).

Instead of being anxious, believers should engage in prayer. Prayer is God's cure for worry, for it dispels doubt and fear. Believers are not to worry about anything, but they are to pray about everything.

Paul identified four particulars about praying. First, prayer is communicating with God. The term itself conveys the thought that we speak directly to God as we draw near to Him (Jas. 4:8). This is not mere recitation or repetition (Matt. 6:7,8). It is addressing God Himself.

When a believer prays, he "enters into the very presence of God, realizing that nothing is too great for his power to accomplish nor too small for his love to be concerned about" (Hendriksen, *Exposition of Philippians*, Baker).

Second, prayer is making supplication, or petition, to God. It is to humbly make a specific plea in reliance on Him. Supplication is casting all those concerns that could cause anxiety upon God for His tending (1 Pet. 5:7). Third, prayer is to be joined and undergirded with thanksgiving. God should be thanked for the very privilege of approaching Him with our petitions.

Fourth, prayer is making specific requests (in contrast to generalities). While God knows all about our needs and concerns (cf. Luke 12:30), our definite requests to Him express our dependence upon Him.

When we understand that God is in control and is watching over us, it does not mean that all of those things that concern us suddenly disappear. We still face

challenges and hardships, but we begin to live in the *peace of God*. This process is not fully explainable. How can God bring peace to a troubled life without taking away all the problems? While not completely rational, it is true. It is a peace that exceeds *all understanding*. It is the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 9:31).

6. Why should Christians meditate on everything of moral value and praise (vs. 8,9)?

Paul continues to direct the Philippians toward lives of moderation and peace by giving them ways to structure their thoughts. Today's news is full of the sordid, the tragic, and the violent. It was no different for the Philippians. Paul says, though, that we have control over our thought lives. We should concentrate on virtuous things, examples of honesty, justice, beauty, and *good* reputation.

These things are happening all around us all the time, but they rarely make the evening news or headlines. Society can become ugly and mean because we are fascinated by ugliness and meanness. We should seek to add *virtue* to our faith (2 Peter 1:5). We should celebrate great deeds of nobleness, inspiring and uplifting music, and beautiful works of art wherever they might be found.

Paul summarized by urging that everything of moral value and note-worthy of praise should be pondered by Christians. He challenged believers to exercise their discernment. Such things are to be taken into account for the purpose of making them personal character qualities. Right thinking leads to right action.

The Philippians had been well instructed about Christian behavior (v. 9 of today's lesson). Nevertheless, the best standard for behavior is not a list of rules but an example. The musician does not gain her skill by reading a book, but from a teacher and practice. Paul never portrays himself as having reached perfection (Philippians 3:12), but he is confident enough in his track record to encourage the readers to live as he lives. He has devoted his life to ministry and service to others. He has been content with very little. He has cherished and guarded his relationships with fellow believers.

This lifestyle has not deprived him of anything he counts as significant. Instead, he has been granted *peace* from God's presence in his life, and this benefit is available to those who imitate him (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17).

JOY AND PEACE IN SHARING (Philippians 4:10-14)

7. Why was Paul grateful to the Philippians (v. 10)?

Although they may have been out of contact for a time, Paul never doubted the concern of the Philippians. Communication and travel are difficult in the ancient world. Letters can go undelivered. Months, even years, might pass with no word. The Philippians did not forget Paul, though. Paul rejoiced in the Lord that the Philippians were now able to give some support to his needs. They had sent aid to him more than once (vs.15,16). After hearing of his imprisonment, they desired to help him again, but an opportunity to send him relief had only recently presented itself. Epaphroditus (2:25-30) was then dispatched to visit Paul with a gift from the church (4:18). Paul responded with a thank-you note telling them how much the gift meant to him.

Paul mentions the poverty of the Macedonian churches in 2 Corinthians 8. The Macedonians of Philippi did not let their poverty keep them from sending financial help for Paul along with Epaphroditus. They did not let inconvenience or difficulty pass for "no opportunity." They were looking for a way to help, not an excuse not to. We should follow their example.

8. What had Paul learned through personal experience (vs. 11,12)?

Paul's rejoicing over the gift was neither a complaint about his condition nor a veiled request for another gift to be sent soon. He was thankful that they had sent a gift. He had learned to be content with whatever he had regardless of his external circumstances. Paul wanted the Philippian believers "to hear—and to see exemplified in the apostle—that the enjoyment of material abundance is *not* the basis for contentment" (Silva, *Philippians*, Baker).

Paul knew how to cope with need or an overabundance in any circumstance. He knew how to live in poor circumstances (cf. 2 Cor. 11:27). But life has sent him more than his share of hardship, mainly because of his commitment to spreading the gospel. No matter what harsh realities and cruelties he encounters, Paul has learned *to be content*. He does not complain, crying out to the Lord that he deserves better. There is no hardship that can separate him from the love of Christ (Romans 8:35). His goal is not a life of ease, but the salvation of souls (2 Timothy 2:9,10). Paul's pain is caused by the unbelief of his fellow Jews (Romans 9:1-3), by the betrayal of the gospel (Galatians 1:9), and other matters.

9. What was Paul's true source of strength (vs. 13,14)?

Verse 13 is one of the most quoted yet misapplied verses in the Bible. Some have taken it to mean that nothing should be impossible for the faithful Christian. This leads to the erroneous conclusion that when things seem impossible, it must be that we lack faith. But there were many things that Paul was unable to do. He was unable to persuade God to remove a physical infirmity from which he suffered, his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). He was unable to keep Demas from deserting him (2 Timothy 4:10). Paul was not an ancient superman.

In context, Paul is speaking about enduring hardship. He admits to times of plenty and times of want. He understands being loved and accepted, as well as being rejected and persecuted. In all these times, he continues to *do*, to function, because of the strengthening grace he receives from his faith in Christ. Because of this ministry of the Lord, Paul is able to claim "strength" in his weakest moments (see 2 Corinthians 12:10). He may live a penniless, physically battered, unappreciated life, but he is still strong in Christ.

Paul finishes this thought by complimenting the Philippians for remembering him and trying to ease his suffering. They know of his hardships in Rome and have sent Epaphroditus with a monetary gift to help him (Philippians 2:25; 4:18). Paul is saying in effect, "I would have survived without you because of the strengthening power of Christ. I have done it before. But I sure do appreciate your help."

PRACTICAL POINTS

- 1.** There will be no discord among those who are truly focused on the Lord (Philippians 4:2,3).
- 2.** There is always reason to rejoice if we know Jesus (v. 4).
- 3.** "Moderation," or gentleness, is not to be reserved for a few but to be shown to all (v. 5).
- 4.** We find peace and freedom from worry when we give our concerns to God and dwell on virtuous things (vs. 6-9).
- 5.** We may be God's means of helping others and causing them to glorify Him (v. 10).
- 6.** Contentment comes from knowing that God is in control of our lives (vs. 11-14).

CONCLUSION

Buying Happiness

An old saying claims, "Money cannot buy happiness." We often joke about this, saying that we would at least like to give it a try. We look at our lives and wonder whether more money would make things better. Would it relieve stress? Would it allow us to bless other people? Would it get me the new car or house I have always wanted?

The truth is that the happiness that money can purchase is fleeting. It is not satisfying in the long run and does not give us real contentment. The desire for money will cause evil in one's life (1 Timothy 6:10). It causes a soul-poisoning restlessness, the uncontented life always wanting more.

Some of the most joyful, contented, purposeful people I have known were people of very modest means. Some of the most miserable were very wealthy. Paul's emphasis in today's lesson is that we can be content in poverty or wealth if we trust in God. Personal peace does not come from controlling our situation through abundant wealth, but in yielding that control to God and trusting Him to provide. Jesus taught that concern over wealth and security was driven by a lack of faith (Luke 12:27, 28). May we seek peace through our relationship to God and our service to Him.

PRAYER

Gracious Father, help us to find contentment in our lives. Give us the peace that passes human understanding. May we be satisfied with Your provision. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

We may experience lives of ongoing joy and peace as we find contentment in our relationship with God.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

In next week's lesson Paul arrived at Rome, the capital of the mighty Roman Empire. Although he was a holder of Roman citizenship and had done nothing illegal, he was put under house arrest. The Jewish reception of his gospel message was mixed, but there were also Gentiles in the palace and other places who responded to it (Phil. 1:13). Paul set an example of a steadfast witness for Christ. Study Acts 28:16-25a, 28-31
"Upheld by God."

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