

## REJOICE, KNOWING THIS

- A. Introduction: We are talking about the importance of learning to praise and thank God continually as part of a larger discussion about who Jesus is and why He came into this world.
1. Jesus came into this world to open the way for sinful men and women to be restored to our created purpose as holy, righteous sons and daughters of God. Eph 1:4-5
    - a. When a person bows their knee to Jesus as Savior and Lord, on the basis of Jesus' sacrificial death, that man or woman is declared righteous. God then indwells that person by His Spirit and life and makes him or her His literal son or daughter by birth. John 1:12-13; I John 5:1
    - b. This new birth is the beginning of a process of transformation that will ultimately restore every part of our being to all that God intends us to be—sons and daughters who are fully pleasing to Him in every thought, word, and action.
      1. Almighty God wants sons and daughters who are like Jesus in His humanity—like Him in character, holiness, love, and power. Jesus is the pattern for God's family. Rom 8:29
      2. Jesus was a Father pleaser. He always did what pleased His Father. Jesus' attitude (mindset) was: Not my will but yours. As sons and daughters of God, our mindset is supposed to be: Not my will but yours. John 8:29; Matt 26:39; Matt 16:24-25; II Cor 5:15; etc.
    - c. It is God's will that, as His sons and daughters, we rejoice and be thankful always: Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (I Thess 5:16-18, ESV).
  2. We struggle with this because we associate praise and thanksgiving with music and emotions. Therefore, we praise God when a worship song we like is playing, or when we feel good and things are going well for us. We don't think of praising God when we feel bad or something has gone wrong.
    - a. However, praise, in its most basic form, is not connected to music, feelings, or circumstances. Praise is a verbal acknowledgement of the virtues (character) and works (actions) of someone.
      1. In normal human interaction there are times when we praise and thank someone because it is appropriate to do so. We acknowledge their character or actions, not based on how we feel or on our circumstances. We praise them because it is right and appropriate to do so.
      2. It is always appropriate to praise the Lord. He is always deserving of praise and thanksgiving for who He is, and for what He has done, is doing, and will do. Ps 107:8, 15, 21, 31
    - b. The Greek word that is translated rejoice in I Thess 5:16 means to be "cheer"ful, to rejoice, to be glad. It is an action, as opposed to a feeling. Be cheerful rather than feel cheerful.
      1. When you cheer someone, you encourage them and urge them on by giving them reasons why they have hope. To be "cheer"ful means to encourage yourself.
        - A. When you acknowledge God by proclaiming His virtues and His works, you cheer or encourage yourself as you recount the reason you have hope. Nothing can come against you that is bigger than God and He will get you through until He gets you out.
        - B. When you acknowledge God, you not only encourage yourself, you bring glory to Him and open the door to His help in your circumstances. Ps 50:23—Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me (KJV), and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God (NIV).
  2. We have more to say tonight about the importance of learning to praise and thank God no matter how we feel or what we are experiencing.

- B. Last week we pointed out that the Bible instructs us to respond to life's hardships and challenges with joy (be cheerful) because we know some things. James wrote: My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience (James 1:2-3, KJV).

1. This verse says that when we encounter trouble, we should consider it (or count it as) an occasion to joy (be cheerful or encourage ourselves) because we know that the trying or testing of our faith works patience. Before we can discuss what this verse tells us, we need to make several points clear.
  - a. For the past few decades certain Bible teachings have become quite popular, but they are inconsistent with the Scriptures. These teachings give people false expectations about Christian life and leave people unprepared to deal with the harsh realities of life in this world.
  - b. Some of the teachings infer, and others directly say, that you can keep trouble out of your life by following certain “Bible principles”. And, if trouble does come your way, it will be short lived, with no real damage, because Jesus came to give you an abundant life. John 10:10
    1. We have made this point repeatedly in the last few years. Jesus didn’t die to give us a life of abundance life in this life. He came to give us eternal life. We are sojourners who are only passing through this world in its present condition. The greater and better part of our life is after this life in the world to come. (Check our website for more explanation of these points.)
    2. No one who originally heard Jesus state that He came to give life abundantly would have taken that to mean a life with a new car, a promotion on the job, a vacation home, and little or no real problems. The context of the Gospel of John (and the rest of the New Testament) makes it clear that Jesus came to give us eternal life (His uncreated life and Spirit) in abundance.
2. To live a life of continual praise and thanksgiving to God, you first must understand the parameters of life in a sin cursed earth. There is no such thing as a problem free life in this world.
  - a. We live in a fallen world—a world that is infused with a curse of corruption and death because of Adam’s sin. Rom 5:12—When Adam sinned, sin entered the entire human race. His sin spread death throughout all the world, so everything began to grow old and die, for all sinned (TLB).
    1. We deal with the effects of this curse of corruption and death every day—loss, pain, frustration. You can do everything right, and things still go wrong because that’s life in a sin cursed earth.
    2. Jesus Himself said that in this world we will have tribulation, moths and rust will corrupt, and thieves will break in and steal. John 16:33; Matt 6:19
  - b. When troubles come into our life, the first question we ask is: Why did this happen? You must be able to answer the question correctly: Troubles come because that’s life in a sin cursed earth.
    1. The hardships of life don’t come from God. Neither does He test us by orchestrating difficult circumstances. Troubles and trials are just here. For a more in depth discussion of these issues, read my book: *Why Did This Happen? What Is God Doing?*
    2. The hardships of life test or try our faith or trust in God. Questions arise: Is God real? Is He good? Does He care about me? The challenge is: Will you continue to trust and obey Him, continue to believe in Him and what do He says, despite what is going on in your life.
3. Note that James wrote: Consider this (trial) an occasion to joy (be cheerful, encourage yourself with praise) because you know that life’s trials work patience (James 1:3).
  - a. It’s common to hear people say that trials make us patient. But that’s incorrect. Trials don’t make people patient. If trials make people patient, then everyone would be patient because everyone has trials. Trials give us an opportunity to exercise patience.
  - b. We mistakenly think of patience as some vague emotion that we’re supposed to feel in certain situations. When we know we should be more patient in a situation and we don’t feel that emotion, we feel guilty about not feeling it.
    1. The Greek word that is translated patience does not mean an emotion or a feeling. It means to persevere or stay under. It has the idea of cheerful or hopeful endurance.
    2. Trials give you an opportunity to demonstrate or express patience—to endure the trial (or stand the storm), and stay faithful to the Lord no matter how you feel or what comes your way.
4. James wrote that the trying or testing of your faith works patience. The Greek word that is translated

works means to work fully, to accomplish, to finish.

a. It is the same word that Paul used when he wrote: Work out—cultivate, carry out to the goal and fully complete—your own salvation with reverence and awe and trembling...for it is God Who is all the while effectually at work in you (Phil 2:12-13, Amp).

1. Remember what the goal or end result of salvation is—sons and daughters who are fully conformed to the image of Christ, like Jesus in every part of our being. Rom 8:29

2. Trials often expose unChrist-like character traits in us that need to be dealt such as complaining and mistreating others. Most of us are pleasant to be around when things are going well. But pressure from an irritating or difficult circumstance can weaken our resolve to behave in a Christ-like way. Ugly traits and behaviors come out. We excuse them because they feel right in the moment.

b. Trials also present you with an opportunity to exercise the strength that comes from the Holy Spirit dwelling in you. As you exercise your will—choose to obey God, stay faithful to Him, and treat people right, no matter what you see or feel—He is in you to strengthen you to follow through.

1. Note the very next statement Paul made after he talked about carrying to completion our salvation by the power of the Holy Spirit in us: In everything you do, stay away from complaining and arguing, so that no one can speak a word of blame against you. You are to live clean, innocent lives as children of God in a dark world full of crooked and perverse people.

Let your lives shine brightly before them (Phil 2:14-16, NLT).

2. When you respond to trials (from minor irritations to major catastrophes) with praise to God, helps you get control of the unChrist-like parts of your character and behavior and act in a more godly way.

A. James also wrote: We all make mistakes, but those who control their tongues can also control themselves in every other way (James 3:2, NLT).

B. When you harness your mouth with praise (not because you feel like it, but as an act of obedience) it helps you get control of the thoughts and emotions that can drive you to unChrist-like behavior.

c. In his statement about counting it all joy when you encounter troubles, James is illustrating an important Bible theme. Note what James wrote after he told Christians to count it all joy.

1. James 1:2-4—Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything (NLT).

2. God is so great that He is able to use circumstances that He does not orchestrate and cause them to serve His ultimate purpose for a family of sons and daughters who are like Jesus. When you know this, it makes it easier to respond with praise in hard times.

5. Paul the apostle echoed that same idea when he wrote that trials give us an opportunity to use and strengthen patience or endurance, until we end up with proven faith—faith that withstood the storm.

a. Rom 5:3-4—We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to endure. And endurance develops strength of character in us, and character strengthens our confident expectation of salvation (NLT).

1. The Greek word translated rejoice in this verse means to boast. It can also be translated joy or glory. Strength of character can be translated experience or proven faith. Proven faith gives us confident expectation of salvation—another way of saying it gives us the hope of salvation.

2. When you make it through one trial, it gives you hope that you will make it through whatever life in a fallen world brings your way. And, it gives you the assurance that as we trust and obey God, He who has begun a good work in us will complete it. Phil 1:6

b. A little later in this same letter (Romans) Paul made a number of short statements about how Christians—those who are committed to following Jesus—are supposed to behave.

1. Note one portion: Love one another with brotherly affection...be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer (Rom 12:10-12, ESV).
2. How we treat people matters in the good times and in the bad times, as does our fervor for the Lord. Life's hardships don't free us from our obligation to love God and love our neighbor.
  - A. Notice that Paul urges Christians to rejoice in hope and be patient in tribulation. Rejoice is the same Greek words that James used in James 1:2-4. Rejoice means to be "cheer"ful as opposed to feel cheerful. Patience means cheerful or hopeful endurance.
  - B. Praise and thanksgiving (proclaiming who God is and what He has done, is doing, and will do) encourages you during the trial because it reminds you of God's past help, present provision, future promises. Knowing this gives you hope.

C. Conclusion: We have more to say next week about the importance of learning to praise and thank God always, no matter how you feel or what is happening in your life. But consider these thoughts as we close.

1. You won't be able to thank and praise God continually unless you see the big picture. There's more to life than just this life and what you are dealing with right now. We are eternal beings who have a future and a hope, not just in this life, but in the life to come—first in Heaven and then on this earth made new.
  - a. Remember where we started this lesson. We asked why Jesus came into this world. Jesus came to earth to pay for sin through His death so that sinful men and women can be transformed into holy, righteous sons and daughters of God—restored to our created purpose. Eph 1:4-5; John 1:12-13; etc.
    1. Jesus will come again in the not too distance future to cleanse and restore this physical, material world into what the Bible calls the new heavens (sky, atmosphere) and new earth. Rev 21-22
    2. All who died in Christ will be reunited with their bodies raised from the dead (made immortal and incorruptible, I Cor 15:51-54) so that we can live again on this earth—this time forever. And life will finally be what it was always intended to be before sin damaged God's creation.
  - b. When Jesus was on earth, He knew that through His death and resurrection He was going to activate God's plan of redemption by delivering men and women from the penalty of sin, and opening the way for all who believe on Him to become God's sons and daughters.
    1. But Jesus also knew that it would be at least two thousand years before He restores the family home by delivering this world from the curse of corruption and sin. Jesus further knew that life in this fallen world will continue to be a toil until He returns.
    2. John 16:33—The night before Jesus went to the Cross He told His followers: In this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.
      - A. This Greek word for cheer means to take courage: Be confident, certain—undaunted—for I have overcome the world.—I have deprived it of power to harm, have conquered it [for you] (John 16:33, Amp).
      - B. Jesus didn't tell these men that He was going to stop all trouble. He told them that through redemption He was going to deprive this world from power to harm us permanently. Thus, we can be certain that all will be made right, some in this life and some in the life to come.
2. We can praise and thank God continually because, no matter what we're facing, it isn't bigger than God. It didn't take Him by surprise. He sees a way to cause it to serve His ultimate purposes and His plans for good. No matter what we're facing, it's temporary and subject to change by God's power, either in this life or the life to come. And He will get us through until He gets us out. Much more next week!