

## **Rejoice**

### **Philippians 3:1-11**

14<sup>th</sup> February 2021

Let us come to God in prayer before we think about His word:

Come Holy Spirit, come reveal Jesus. Come Holy Spirit, lead us in the way of Jesus. Come Holy Spirit, with power and deep conviction, for we ask it in Jesus name,

Amen

What I'm about to say by introduction will come as a surprise, but there are times when I envy Winnie the Pooh, so carefree, so focused on the moment, and in one of his more memorable lines he says "Life is a journey to be experienced, not a problem to be solved." and yet, I know that I and probably we yearn for solutions to the complexities, to the hardships that come our way, for life is a journey, yet it's full of unexpected twists and turns, of situations that break our hearts and which we'd rather not experience at all.

I wonder friends, I wonder if you're facing a hard time at present? It may be in the context of Coronavirus and its impact on you. It could be something else, a situation, a difficulty, that is now part of your life's story and the words of Pooh bear just seem empty, or they irk. So, is there another perspective? is there another place to go where we might find hope for the journey and strength amidst the questions?

Well, the early Church knew real hardship, maybe greater than we've ever known. Paul himself knew such trials, indeed, just before our passage today, he spoke of Epaphroditus whom he almost lost, which would have been sorrow upon sorrow for him, and then, in the change of topic in chapter three, Paul seems to anticipate difficulties ahead for the Philippians and so he seeks to safeguard them.

So, what is it he shares? What gives Paul such hope for the journey of life? How is it possible, even for this man locked in prison, facing the potential of execution, how can he keep speaking in chapter after chapter about rejoicing?

In our passage today Paul speaks of the trust and hope he has in Jesus. Here is a man who achieved and displayed high moral spiritual religious attainment, his rank, his status, his exemplary life were beyond compare and yet he came to realize that they were a false basis for any hope or confidence before God, even a hindrance. We often think that the Good News of God's word about Jesus and His kingdom might be just for the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the sinners that we read about so often in the Gospels and yet, here is Paul, a model citizen, a model man, in need as well, and so, we see in his life, that we're all in need, we're all in need of this Good News, the Good News that says that we can have a right relationship with God, we can have righteousness through simple faith in Jesus, the Jesus that we read about in chapter 2, who is God in human

form, the Jesus who gave up the perfection and glory of heaven to be born as a babe in squalor, to know the grief of losing a loved one, and then to be abandoned by His friends before being unjustly tried, mocked, tortured and crucified.

This is the Jesus that Paul now puts his trust, his confidence in. He says "... whatever gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ." Those old attainments, they are worthless. Paul describes them like garbage and the Greek gets literally "dung"! Paul had been striving, Paul had been seeking to live the perfect life, Paul thought he might attain a right relationship with God through his own effort, and yet, he came to realize it was all folly and that instead God was offering him the gift of a fresh start, in a right relationship with Himself through faith, simple faith, and that astounded Paul!

It turned his world upside down! This wasn't the way God was meant to behave. This wasn't how God showed His power and holiness, surely? and yet it was, because in Jesus coming, and as a man, and his death on the cross, God showed His true power, His true holiness and the depth of His love for us.

Paul came to experience this for himself and says "I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord."

Knowing here is more than knowing about facts. To have knowledge of something, especially from a biblical perspective and to have knowledge of a person is to have an intimate personal relationship.

Paul came to know Jesus, to know God through simple faith, and this became the foundation of his life. His confidence was now in Jesus, both for this life and for the next. No longer was Paul putting his confidence in ritual, ethnicity, rank or tradition. It didn't matter to what group he belonged and no longer did it matter about his rule-keeping, his zealotry for his faith, or his obedience to the law.

His confidence, his trust, his hope, was in Jesus, by having a relationship with Jesus.

Friends, have we come to that place yet? Have we each come to the place of finding, possessing and treasuring Jesus for ourselves?

Because he promises to be the rock upon which we can cling in the storms. He promises to be the good shepherd who journeys with us through the valley of the shadow of death. Because hard times do come. There are unexpected twists and turns but Jesus is still there. Jesus is ready to hold you fast no matter the smallness of your faith.

I had a friend at a past church and she shared one time that she'd wandered from the way of Jesus, but life had got hard and she knew she should turn back to Jesus, yet she struggled with doubt and was put off following Jesus by a number of things, and yet she started to pray "Jesus help me to want, to want to follow you" that's how far she felt from Jesus. She didn't even want to follow Him. That's how little faith she had, and yet she

prayed that prayer, and kept praying that prayer, and in time she found her way into a powerful and life-changing relationship with Jesus.

Friends, who is Jesus to you? Has He yet become a person you relate to directly and personally? or are you still trying to add something to simple faith in him? Because, when you add something to the Good News of Jesus you lose the Good News completely. The only thing that counts is faith in Jesus, and when you have that, truly, then you have a rock that is secure even in the storms, and so you have hope for the journey.

Yet Paul not only knew hope by trusting in Jesus, he was able to say again and again Rejoice in the Lord. But what does he mean by that? Because it's really hard to rejoice in the midst of suffering and loss, especially when it's a loved one that's going through that?

A few things to note, I think, in passing,

Firstly, Paul knew sorrow and anxiety. Just read the end of chapter two, and faced even more when Epaphroditus was near death. So, Paul is not saying Christians should only feel joy. Furthermore he addresses a community of faith, not simply individuals, and so some will rejoice in joy and some, I think, will rejoice in sadness, because, here's the thing, I think we're conditioned to think that rejoicing must mean we can, must be happy, or that we can only rejoice when we're happy. But to rejoice in the Lord could simply be to cling to the Lord in those hard times. To rejoice in the Lord can simply be to declare again and again the promises of God, and the hope we have in Him. Like the hope we have that there is a resurrection from the dead, or that Jesus is with us in the midst of the storm, and that our God will never leave us nor abandon us.

Friends, to rejoice in the Lord is to appreciate Jesus for who He is and what He has done. It is to find a measure, even a small measure, of satisfaction in the Lord, and yet, too often, I think we cultivate an ingratitude or, sadly, even apathy or coldness towards the Lord along the journey of life.

So, if your satisfaction with the Lord is low or missing, then it simply means you have more to learn about the Lord, you have more to appreciate of Jesus still.

And the Good News is that he always extends an invitation to know Him better.

Over the past few months, as I've walked the dog, I've been listening to the audiobook The Hiding Place. It's the life story of Corey Ten Boom, that lady I mentioned last Remembrance Sunday. She lived through World War 2 in Holland and then was taken to a concentration camp where she lost her sister. It has to be one of the hardest books to read or listen to, and yet I was struck by individuals who, time and time again, found and kept hope and even a measure of rejoicing in the very darkest of journeys.

Friends, I don't know all that you are facing just now. I know one message can't speak to all situations yet, I do pray that like Paul, like Corey Ten Boom and her sister, might we too have hope through trust in Jesus, might we too have a steadfast rejoicing in Him as we get to know and appreciate Him more in each of our life's journey.

May it be so, Amen