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PRESIDENT'S LETTER - December 2008

The Apostle Paul ends his letter of joy to the Philippians with exhortation, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice." It is interesting that this encouragement to always rejoice is connected with Judgment Day and the glorious return of Jesus. The reason given for this joy is the proclamation, "The Lord is at hand."

This leads into Paul's pastoral affirmation of joy in verse 10 of Philippians 4, "**I rejoiced in the Lord greatly.**"

WHY PASTORS CAN REJOICE GREATLY

1. **Your rejoicing is not tied to the things of this world.**

Paul made it clear that his joy was not tied to what he had or what he did not have. Remember that Paul was writing this letter from a royal prison in Rome where he expected to be executed soon. Paul writes that he had learned through his life lessons to be content in whatever situation he found himself. Contentment is not simply having a lot of things so that you can take it easy and enjoy life. The very opposite is true. Often the more people have the less content they really are. You can see the difference between children in our country and the children in India. Our children often are unhappy and whiny no matter what they have. The Indian children's eyes light up with a pencil and a tablet.

Contentment is being satisfied with whatever the Lord has given to you in this life. This is applied specifically to your ministries. Paul had been through it all. Paul states, "I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound." Paul knew the highs of preaching to a large number of people and establishing many congregations. Paul also knew the lows of being hounded out of town because he preached Christ crucified. He knew the lows of being ridiculed, beaten, and thrown into jail.

Paul wants to share with you the secret of pastoral contentment. "In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need." Paul was able to rejoice in every circumstance because his joy was centered in his Lord Jesus. This was not the joy of self-centered achievement. This was not the self-centered sorrow of losing everything. The secret was the affirmation, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." Paul learned to trust in the God of his salvation for everything. He learned to acknowledge that Jesus is in control.

These are difficult lessons to learn. We tend to tie our joy to what we have accomplished. Good times and prosperity tend to inflate our egos as we exhibit to others what we have done. This is also true of our spiritual lives. The Pharisee parades his good works as he prays, "God, I thank you that I am not as bad as others." Paul and Luther sought to establish their righteousness by their works and deeds. This self-righteousness cannot bring true joy and peace. We learn that our spiritual strength can only come from Jesus. Jesus did everything for all of us. We need to learn that our strength is only made complete in connection with our weakness. When we are weak, we are strong in Christ. Our joy is that we can do all things only through Jesus who strengthens us.

2. Your rejoicing is tied to Jesus.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Jesus came the first time into this world of sorrow and sin in order to learn obedience through suffering. Jesus' joy was made full when He suffered and died for the sins of the world. We look forward to that day when Jesus will return a second time in all His glory and victory to judge the living and the dead. The Lord is at hand. As we wait for this day, Jesus strengthens us and provides for all our needs.

Paul rejoiced in the love that the Philippian Christians showed to him in his need. Paul was not trying to emphasize his needs in order to angle for contributions. He had learned in every circumstance to be content. It was not about him. However, Paul's needs were opportunities for the Philippian believers to show their love for him and for Jesus. (Phil 4:10) "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity." The Philippians showed their kindness by sharing Paul's troubles. They had in the past met the needs of Paul's ministry. Paul was confident that God would bless them for their gifts. (Phil 4:19-20) "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. {20} Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen." What a blessed thing when your congregation and fellow Christians show their love for you in practical ways! Let us also respond to the opportunities provided to us by the needs of others.

As you wait for Jesus to return may your ministry be filled with joy and peace. (Phil 4:4-7) "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! {5} Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. {6} Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; {7} and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

The Blessings of this Advent season to you and your people.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John Schierenbeck".

John Schierenbeck, CLC President