

“Rejoice In...” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Advent 3 – December 15, 2024

- I. **Philippians 4:4** – Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.
- II. **Is anyone able to rejoice on command?**
 - a. It’s interesting that God’s Word is exhorting or trying to motivate Christians to rejoice in Him always.
 - i. It’s just like the words in 1 Thessalonians 5, “¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thess. 5:16-18)
 - ii. Again, is it actually possible to always rejoice, never stop praying, and give thanks no matter what?
 - b. Sometimes God’s Word seems to put us in a difficult position because we want to obey and do what it says, but we don’t know how to do it.
 - c. The Word says rejoice!
 - i. Are we supposed to dance around like wild people?
 - ii. Should we just put a giant smile on our face no matter what happens or how we feel?
 - iii. Maybe if we put on an ugly Christmas sweater and some lighted reindeer horns on our heads?
 - d. These are just outward signs that make it look like you’re happy, but everyone deals with struggles on the inside that no one sees.
- III. **The holiday season is not full of rejoicing for everyone.**
 - a. From personal experience, my mom passed away around Christmas, and it always brings up a little sadness for me.
 - i. Whether it’s around the holidays or not, the death of a loved one makes it hard because we notice the missing place at the table... the empty chair in the living room... the connection we once had.
 - b. We might even be a little irritated by all the “happy, happy, joy, joy” stuff going on all around us when we are feeling unhappy or negative.
 - i. All these people who get out there and decorate their places from top to bottom, bake all kinds of cookies and candies, throw huge Christmas parties, and write hundreds of Christmas cards stand in stark contrast to some of us who can’t drum up the energy right now.
 - c. Sometimes the lack of joy in our hearts leads to falling for temptations.
 - i. We know that all the sweets and holiday treats will make us feel worse if we go too far... but people push them on us... or set them in our path everywhere we go... and we overindulge.
 - ii. We don’t really need anything, but we see all the deals going on and spend way more than we can afford – and some people get a temporary kick out of buying stuff... but pay dearly later.
 - iii. Others go for drugs and alcohol to manufacture a little joy, or to compensate for the sadness or the anxiety they feel – only to find that

it always makes everything worse – relationships, health, and our spiritual life.

- iv. Some of us fall for the idea that other people will make us happy, and we get into unhealthy relationships, only to suffer the consequences.
- d. The trouble with all of these things – and you can probably see some of the ways you fall for temptations to manufacture joy – is they are temporary fixes that don't really fix anything.
 - i. Maybe that's why they call taking certain drugs "a fix" even though it should be called taking "a beating" instead.
- e. The challenge for all of us is stepping back from the things that tempt us to rejoice in them... and instead "rejoice in the Lord always".

IV. **The Lord is so much bigger than His creation.**

- a. We trust in the Lord and rejoice in Him, not the things He created for us.
 - i. Creation is what God provides to take care of our needs.
 - ii. It's not bad to appreciate the good gifts God gives us – but we not only turn them into idols – we transform them into sinful and broken activities and dependencies.
- b. The point is that we need to look beyond created things for our hearts to rejoice, the calming of our anxieties, and the ability to give thanks in all times – whether bad or good!
- c. So, what is beyond creation that we look to?
 - i. Jesus... God Himself.
 - ii. The Nicene Creed says Jesus is "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God..."
 - 1. Jesus is not just another created being – He is the God of the universe who was sent from the Father to redeem and restore us and all creation.
 - 2. Jesus came into the world to be a part of our lives and creation, but He never sinned or fell for the temptations that get to us all the time.
 - iii. We rejoice and trust in Jesus because He is so much more than anything else...
 - 1. So much more than food...
 - 2. So much more than spending money and wealth...
 - 3. So much more than drugs and alcohol...
 - 4. And so much more than relationships...
- d. Whatever we think will bring us joy can never measure up to the gift that Jesus Christ brings into our lives – the forgiveness of our sins by grace through faith.
 - i. The sins that come so naturally to us do not go unpunished... no, they were put on Jesus as He was nailed to the cross.

- ii. The weight of our sins, along with all people's sins, crushed our Savior – and let me say that only God is big enough to pay for that much evil and brokenness.
- iii. Yes, the forgiveness of sins is worth rejoicing over at all times... and the gift of a Savior who came into the world for that purpose is worth rejoicing over as well.

V. **Going back to my first question, can anyone rejoice on command?**

- a. The answer is no.
 - i. No one can just rejoice because we are told to... like, "You better rejoice, or else!"
 - ii. No one can love someone else just because we are told to... "You better love that person, or else!"
 - iii. Whatever rejoicing or loving that comes from a person because they feel guilty or compelled is not real joy – and not real love.
- b. No one rejoices on command, but we rejoice in faith.
 - i. Another way to say it is we are always able to rejoice because faith makes it possible.
 - ii. Faith is my simple trust in the Lord and my absolute confidence that Jesus died and rose again to save me.
 - 1. Faith is ours as a gift of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God and baptism – and this gift of faith allows joy, thanksgiving, and even prayers to constantly pour out... no matter what's going on in the world around us.
 - iii. Rejoicing isn't forced out of us... it isn't wearing a happy face with all kinds of bitterness on the inside... it flows out of faith.
 - iv. We "always" have faith, so we can always rejoice.
- c. A speaker named Jeremy Begbie told a story about attending a worship service in South Africa.
 - i. Right before the service he was told about several tragedies... from a house nearby that was burned down because people thought he stole something... to a tornado that recently ripped apart fifty homes and killed five people... and just the day prior, one of their Sunday School kids was the victim of a crime and passed away.
 - ii. The pastor began his opening prayer: "Lord, You are the Creator and the Sovereign, but why did the wind come like a snake and tear our roofs off? Why did a crime cut short the life of one of our own children, when he had everything to live for? Over and over again, Lord, we are in the midst of death."
 - iii. As he spoke, the congregation responded with deep sighs and groaning... And then, once he finished his prayer, very slowly, the whole congregation began to sing, at first very quietly, then louder.

1. They sang and they sang, song after song of praise—praise to Jesus— the God who came into the very worst... to give us a hope and a promise that the victory is ours.
 - iv. A congregation sang for joy in the midst of tragedy – and it flowed naturally from their faith and trust in the Lord.
 - d. Nothing is more real than the joy that comes from our faith – and no amount of good or bad can change our ability to rejoice.
 - e. Rejoice in the Lord always... Rejoice in faith. Amen.