

I.N.I.

22nd Sunday after Pentecost
October 20, 2013
Philippians 1:1-5, 19-27

In Christ Jesus, who gave His life for us so that we might have life eternal, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

“I rejoice! Do you rejoice?” That is essentially what the Apostle Paul in this letter is asking his readers, the members of the congregation in Philippi. And the amazing thing about that is that Paul was writing this letter from his prison cell in Rome. How could he rejoice?

Paul was sending his fellow worker Epaphroditus to Philippi to deliver this letter. A letter filled with the Gospel message of joy and news about Paul’s trial and his prospects of release. He writes with pastoral concern for the members thanking them for the financial gift they had gathered and given to him. He also speaks about their internal troubles as a congregation and encourages them in the midst of persecution to remain joyful in Christ and warns them against the dangers of the Judaizers who teach of the absolute necessity of circumcision and keeping the ceremonial laws as a source of their righteousness before God.

The theme of this letter is found in chapter 4:4: **REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS. AGAIN I WILL SAY, REJOICE!**

And it is with that note of joy that the Apostle begins his letter giving thanks to God for the Philippians continued partnership in the Gospel from the first day on. We read again vss. 1-5: **PAUL AND TIMOTHY, BONDSERVANTS OF JESUS CHRIST, TO ALL THE SAINTS IN CHRIST JESUS WHO ARE IN PHILIPPI, WITH THE BISHOPS AND DEACONS: GRACE TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD OUR FATHER AND THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. I THANK MY GOD UPON EVERY REMEMBRANCE OF YOU, ALWAYS IN EVERY PRAYER OF MINE MAKING REQUEST FOR YOU ALL WITH JOY, FOR YOUR FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL FROM THE FIRST DAY UNTIL NOW.**

Our theme this morning is the words from Paul in verse 27:

**LET YOUR CONDUCT BE WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST
I: BY JOYFULLY GIVING THANKS TO GOD FOR OUR FELLOWSHIP.**

We dare not jump over Paul’s introductory words. They are very important as they set the stage for what he wants the Philippians and us to understand and learn. He and Timothy, who was with him at the time in Rome and was well known by the Philippian Christians, were servants, literally bond-slaves of Jesus Christ. Jesus had bought them with His shed blood and as a result they were free from sin and death and now belonged to Jesus. He was their Lord and Master to whom they were deeply devoted in their service.

This letter is to all of the saints in Christ, the set-apart ones, the sanctified ones in the Philippian congregation and also to the leaders, the overseers and deacons. They had been called out of the darkness of sin and unbelief into the marvelous light of Jesus, sanctified by the Holy Spirit and gathered together into this Christian congregation.

“Grace and peace” Grace=God’s undeserved love in Christ for these unworthy sinners, freely given to them which brought about the gift of Peace which Christ earned for them by His sacrificial death and resurrection, reconciling them to the Father, making them at one with God. By His redeeming work Jesus satisfied God’s justice, appeased God’s wrath, delivered sinners from God’s curse and judgment and established the right relation between the holy God and redeemed mankind.

Paul gives thanks to God for these believers---“**Upon EVERY remembrance, ALWAYS in EVERY prayer for you ALL with joy.**”

Paul was under house arrest in Rome, yet every time he thought of these believers in Philippi he rejoiced with thanksgiving to God. They all were dear to him. He prayed for them because he had a deep affection for them and was concerned for their souls. He also gave thanks to God for their fellowship and partnership in the Gospel.

It had been over 10 years since Paul first met them on his second missionary journey. Perhaps you remember how on the Sabbath Day Paul went out to the river where many Jewish women were gathered and met Lydia, the seller of purple. He preached about Jesus to them and Lydia begged them to stay at her house. Later Paul cast out a demon from a slave girl who could foretell the future. He and his companions were arrested and beaten.

What happened? There was an earthquake and the jail cell doors were opened. The jailer who was in charge of the prisoners was about to kill himself thinking the prisoners had escaped, but he was rescued by God through Paul's proclamation of Jesus Christ crucified and risen again.

Paul met with this congregation again two more times on his third missionary journey.

So how often do we joyfully give thanks to God for the blessed fellowship, the wonderful partnership of the Gospel that we share? As I was working on this sermon I thought of the past few weeks. In early October I was in Marquette fellowshiping with fellow pastors, enjoying the blessed partnership of the Gospel with them. It was great. And just this past week Ruth and I were in Florida where we worshipped with the CLC Teachers on Sunday and enjoyed the fellowship and partnership of the Gospel with them. That was also very special.

But we have that here everyday. Every Sunday we fellowship and worship together. We study the Bible together every Wednesday evening. We are bound together with Christ's blood as brothers and sisters. Do we thank God upon every remembrance of each other always in every prayer for each other for our fellowship in joy?

May the Holy Spirit move us to **LET OUR CONDUCT BE WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST BY JOYFULLY GIVING THANKS TO GOD FOR OUR FELLOWSHIP.**

LET YOUR CONDUCT BE WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

II: BY LIVING FOR CHRIST.

Paul was torn. He earnestly desired to live for Christ, to serve His Lord by serving others. He knew that his labor in the Lord would bear fruit. But he also desired to be with the Lord in heaven. You can hear the seriousness in his words: **MY EARNEST EXPECTATION AND HOPE THAT IN NOTHING I SHALL BE ASHAMED, BUT WITH ALL BOLDNESS, AS ALWAYS, SO NOW ALSO CHRIST WILL BE MAGNIFIED IN MY BODY WHETHER BY LIFE OR BY DEATH.**

Paul expected and hoped that neither his sufferings for Christ nor his service for Christ would put him to shame. He prayed for the boldness and courage to continue to speak up for Jesus. He had written to the Romans: **FOR I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST, FOR IT IS THE POWER OF GOD TO SALVATION FOR EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES.**

Paul did not desire his own glory, earthly success, or temporal comfort, but that Christ would be glorified in his body and that Christ's name would be praised whether he lived or died. He is content to leave the issues of life and death in the hands of God. He writes: **FOR TO ME, TO LIVE IS CHRIST, AND TO DIE IS GAIN. BUT IF I LIVE ON IN THE FLESH, THIS WILL MEAN FRUIT FROM MY LABOR; YET WHAT I SHALL CHOOSE I CANNOT TELL. FOR I AM HARD PRESSED BETWEEN THE TWO, HAVING A DESIRE TO DEPART AND BE WITH CHRIST, WHICH IS FAR BETTER. NEVERTHELESS TO REMAIN IN THE FLESH IS MORE NEEDFUL FOR YOU.**

Paul is willing to live if his apostolic ministry is still needed for the spread of the Gospel but he is also willing to die if his death as a martyr would best serve his Savior's cause. What an amazing testimony of faith! If a believer's life is Christ, then it naturally follows that "to die is gain." Death for the believer in Christ is not the loss of life, but the gain of eternal life forever.

Is that your motto? **TO LIVE IS CHRIST, AND TO DIE IS GAIN.** The presence of Christ and the fellowship with Christ is the very breath of life for the believer. Therefore living is Christ and then dying would mean rest from our labors, freedom from all temptations, trials, troubles and tribulations of this life. That is not a loss, but great gain. The Psalmist David writes in Psalm 16:11: **IN YOUR PRESENCE IS FULLNESS OF JOY; AT YOUR RIGHT HAND ARE PLEASURES FOREVERMORE.**

May the Holy Spirit move us to **LET OUR CONDUCT BE WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST BY LIVING FOR CHRIST.**

LET YOUR CONDUCT BE WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

III: BY SHARING THE GOSPEL WITH OTHERS.

Paul submits his will to the Lord. He had the firm, personal conviction that he would survive his imprisonment and be set free to again proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He writes: **AND BEING CONFIDENT OF THIS, I KNOW THAT I SHALL REMAIN AND CONTINUE WITH YOU ALL FOR YOUR PROGRESS AND JOY OF FAITH, THAT YOUR REJOICING FOR ME MAY BE MORE ABUNDANT IN JESUS CHRIST BY MY COMING TO YOU AGAIN. ONLY LET YOUR CONDUCT BE WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST, SO THAT WHETHER I COME AND SEE YOU OR AM ABSENT, I MAY HEAR OF YOUR AFFAIRS, THAT YOU STAND FAST IN ONE SPIRIT, WITH ONE MIND STRIVING TOGETHER FOR THE FAITH OF THE GOSPEL.**

Paul exhorts his readers to steadfastness in Christ, to live and to behave as citizens of the Lord's kingdom who let their conduct be worthy of the Gospel of Christ in the midst of temptations. Be firm and immovable in the face of false teachings and the animosity of those who hate the Gospel. In the midst of trials be steadfast and be of one mind striving together, battling together for the Gospel.

Is that your battle? We need to take to heart these words of Paul. There is need for unity among us today, more than ever. We need to stand fast and firm in God's Word of salvation which teaches us that we are saved alone through Jesus' sacrifice for us. His perfect life. His sacrificial death on the cross. His glorious resurrection from the grave. We need to strive together, fight together for the preservation of the pure Gospel and for the faith once delivered to the saints of old.

May the Holy Spirit move us to

LET OUR CONDUCT BE WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

by joyfully thanking God for our fellowship with each other as partners in the Gospel;

by living daily for Christ and being ready to die in Christ which is great gain;

and by striving for this unity in the faith and sharing the Good News of Jesus life, death and resurrection at all times with others.

Thank God, that for me and you

TO LIVE /S CHRIST, AND TO DIE /S GAIN.

Amen.