**1 Thessalonians 5:16**

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**Rejoice Always**

***16 Rejoice always; 17 pray without ceasing; 18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.***

* In my previous three messages we examined the 4-verse section of Paul’s instruction to the church regard their relationship to their leadership, the relationship with one another, and their relationship to the world.
* Now, in this next section of practical instruction, v. 16-24, Paul enters **a section of instruction on the principles of holy living**.
  + In the first part of this instruction, v. 16-18, which we will examine this morning, Paul instructs us regarding **the principles to guide our personal, inner life**.
  + In the second part of this instruction, v. 19-22, Paul will instruct us regarding **the** **church’s corporate spiritual life**.
  + And in the third part of this instruction, v. 23-24, **Paul will close this section with a prayer for God’s sanctifying power upon us.**

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**3 Rapid-Fire Commands**

* Here in v. 16-18 begins this new section of instruction without any preamble or explanation. Instead, he abruptly gives **3 terse, rapid-fire commands** . . . ***rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks.***
* In looking at these three commands, I want to point out several significant observations.
  + **First** of all, the three command verbs here are ***rejoice*** (*chairō*—#5463), ***pray*** (*proseuchomai*—#4336) and ***give thanks*** (*eucharisteō*—#2168).
  + In all three of these commands **we are called to action**. In other words, the 3 things that Paul commands are actions that we, as Christians, must be doing. They are verbs of action in that they must be done by us, not for us.
    - We, as Christians, are here being commanded to ***rejoice, pray and give thanks*** as part of our Christian practice.

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**3 Absolute Terms**

* Next, I want to point out that in conjunction with these three commands, Paul uses **3 absolute terms to describe how the commanded actions are to be carried out**.
  + Paul commands that we are to ***rejoice always***, that we are to ***pray without ceasing***, and that we are to ***in everything give thanks***.
  + In the **first two commands** Paul uses **adverbs of time** in describing how these commands are to be obeyed. Paul uses the adverbs ***always*** and ***without ceasing***, or ***incessantly***, to describe how frequently these commands are to be obeyed.
  + In the **third** command Paul uses **a term of inclusiveness** to describe what things we are to ***give thanks*** for . . . we are commanded to ***give thanks in everything***.
  + In the Greek text these absolutes are placed first, to give added emphasis. In the Greek text the commands are to ***always rejoice, incessantly pray and in everything give thanks.***
* With the use of these three absolute modifiers . . . ***always, incessantly*** and ***in everything*** . . . Paul is not only commanding us to action, but that this action is to be **continuous and all-inclusive. It is to be a continual, ever-present part of our Christian life.**

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**The First Command**

* So, having looked at these three commands in their totality, this morning I want to examine only the first command. The first command, v. 16, commands that we ***rejoice always***.
  + The word ***rejoice*** (*chairō*—#5463)literally means “be of good cheer” or “be glad.” And considering the fact that the Thessalonian church was suffering under the severe persecution of their countrymen, Paul’s command here would seem to be a difficult command to obey.
* And not only does Paul command the Thessalonians to ***rejoice***, but he adds the absolute term of duration . . . he commands the Thessalonians to ***rejoice always***.
* I know what you’re thinking, because I’m thinking it myself . . . **how do you *rejoice always* in the midst of great suffering?**
  + Here in this statement . . . **rejoice in the midst of your suffering** . . . we have the paradox of the Christian life. These two terms, **rejoice** and **suffering**, are mutually exclusive. You can have one or the other, but not both . . . simultaneously!
  + But that is exactly what Paul is commanding here. Even in the midst of our suffering we are commanded to ***rejoice always***.
  + And furthermore, Paul is not commanding us to **rejoice in spite of your suffering**, he is commanding us to **rejoice because of your suffering.**
* But **how** can we **rejoice in the midst of, and because of, our great suffering?**
  + In answer to this question we must first understand that **while “rejoice” means “to be of good cheer” or “to be glad,” it does not mean “enjoy.”**
  + In other words, Paul is not commanding us to **“enjoy your suffering.”** He is not commanding that we adopt some sort of masochistic attitude toward suffering.
  + Paul is calling us to ***rejoice*** . . . to be positive and grateful . . . even in the midst of our suffering.
* **And how are we going to be able to do this?**
  + We are going to be able to do this **by keeping our eyes and our focus on the One who is the source and reason for our rejoicing . . . Jesus Christ.**
  + We have to remember that this letter, 1 Thessalonians, was an early letter of Paul. It would be later, in his letter to the Philippians, that Paul would more clearly state the reason and object of our rejoicing. In his letter to the Philippians we read . . .

***Philippians 3:1— Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.***

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***Philippians 4:4— Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!***

* + Here in Philippians 3:1 and 4:4 Paul clearly states the reason and object of our **rejoicing** . . . we are commanded to ***rejoice in the Lord***.
  + The cause of our rejoicing is **our faith in the Lord and the knowledge that our suffering is according to His will, for His glory and for our sanctification.**
  + It is our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that gives us the confidence that **He not only knows of our suffering, but that He has ordained it for a good reason**. As Paul clearly teaches us in Romans 8:28 . . .

***Romans 8:28— And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.***

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* + While we may not know what God is doing . . . In fact, I assure you that we have no idea what God is doing . . . we can rest in the confidence that **God has a good purpose for the events He has ordained for our lives.**
  + Even in the midst of some of the greatest and most trying times of our lives, it is only when the trial is ended that God allows us to see what a great good has come from it. No matter what happens, we must be assured that whatever trial we come under, **it is ordained by God to accomplish a good purpose or outcome.**
* And not only does the ultimate outcome have a good purpose, but it also has the purpose of strengthening our faith. Notice the opening verses of the epistle of James . . .

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***James 1:1-4— 1 James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. 2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.***

* Look at who the recipients of this statement by James are . . . ***the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad.***
  + He is writing to the Jewish Christians who, because of severe persecution, have been forced to flee Israel and have, ultimately, been scattered throughout the Roman Empire and nations around the Mediterranean.
* Then, immediately following his salutation, the very first thing James tells the dispersed Jewish Christians is to ***rejoice, my brethren, when you encounter various trials***.
  + Why does James say this? Because the Jewish Christians were suffering greatly and needed to be exhorted with the knowledge that they had not been abandoned by God and were not under His wrath.
  + For whatever reason, unknown to anyone, it was God’s will that these people endure a time of suffering. James’ point, stated in v. 3 is ***the testing of your faith* by various trials will *produce endurance . . . that your* faith will be perfected *and complete, lacking in nothing***.
* In beginning his letter with this exhortation, James is teaching his readers the very important truth that **their suffering was being used by God for a good purpose . . . to increase and perfect their faith.**
* **If you, as a Christian . . . especially as a new Christian . . . did not understand that suffering for the name of Christ was according to God’s will, what would you think?**
  + You know what you’d think . . . you’d think, “God isn’t able to protect me.” You would begin to wonder if God was as great and loving and powerful as you were led to believe. After all, if God isn’t able to protect those He calls His own, what good is your faith?

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* Trials and suffering cause people of **weak faith** to **doubt** God.
* Trials and suffering cause people of **no faith** to **turn away from** God.
* But trials and suffering cause people of **strong faith** to **depend on and trust** in God.
  + It is with the knowledge that God uses our trials and suffering to increase our faith that people of strong faith trust God and trust that the outcome of their trials and sufferings have a good purpose and intended outcome.
  + For those people of strong faith, they keep in mind that ***God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose****.*
* We see a wonderful example of this strong faith and confidence in God’s good purposes in Acts 5. In this chapter we read that the apostles go to the temple in Jerusalem to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. But the Pharisees and Sadducees have them arrested and put into prison. But during the night an angel comes and releases them from prison and instructs then to resume preaching, which they do. Once again, the next day, they are arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin. After being ordered not to preach about Jesus again, they are flogged and released.
  + And what was their reaction after they had been severely beaten? Did they doubt God or turn away from God? We read in Acts 5:41 . . .

***Acts 5:41— So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.***

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* + The apostles were men of strong, abiding faith, and they were undeterred by the threats of the Jewish leaders. While they certainly did not enjoy the beating they received, they rejoiced in the knowledge that God was with them and using them to serve Him.
  + As Paul would write, years later, regarding our suffering, in Romans 8:18 . . .

***Romans 8:18— For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.***

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* But for as much as we may know . . . with our hearts . . . that ***God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose***, when the time comes that we actually suffer for the name of Christ, it is easy to question God’s ways.
  + For example, when the early Jewish Christians were suffering great persecution and had been forced out of Israel and dispersed throughout the Mediterranean region, they certainly were questioning God’s ways. That is why the first thing James does in his letter is to exhort them. James knew that they were questioning why God would permit them to suffer as they were.
  + But, for us, we now know that God used the dispersion of the early Christians to spread the gospel message into the whole world. By the dispersion of the Jewish Christians, God was sending thousands of evangelists throughout the Mediterranean.
  + The trials and suffering of the early Christians had the good purpose of taking the message of Jesus Christ into the world. We, having the benefit of hindsight, now see what God did through their suffering.
  + The benefit of hindsight gives us the assurance that when we suffer, God is also doing good things through us. As God teaches us through the prophet Isaiah . . .

***Isaiah 55:9— "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.***

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**An example of rejoicing in the midst of severe trial—Mary and Christopher Love**

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* The teaching of Scripture gives us confidence and faith that God uses all the events of our lives to accomplish His good will . . . despite the fact that we don’t know what, ultimately, will be accomplished. We can only live with the assurance that our suffering is not in vain.
  + But for as great as Scripture is at teaching us these things, it is a great encouragement to each of us when we see how men and women of faith withstood great trials to persevere in their faith.
  + That is why *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* is such a powerful book. It records the stories of our Christian brothers and sisters as they endured some of the most horrific trials imaginable. And, yet, through their suffering they remained strong in their faith.
* This morning I want to share a story of great love and faith in the face of terrible suffering. It is the story of Mary and Christopher Love.
  + Christopher Love was born in 1618 . . . 500 years ago . . . in Cardiff, Wales. He became a Puritan preacher, a brilliant theologian, and a powerful voice in the Presbyterian church. His writings have been recorded and are still available today.
  + But Love also became involved in the politics of England, which brought him notoriety within the English government. On several occasions Love was brought up on charges. And though acquitted each time, his notoriety was his ultimate undoing.
  + In 1651 Love became involved in the plot to return the exiled king, Charles II, to the British throne. For this he was brought up on charges of treason and sentenced to be executed.
  + Mary and Christopher Love had 5 children, with only 2 surviving through infancy. The fifth child was born 13 days after Christopher’s death.
* To show you what true faith and what it means to ***rejoice always***, I want to read to you the last two letters Mary and Christopher Love exchanged with one another before his death.
* On July 14, 1651, Mary wrote to her husband for the last time. It is a powerful testament to the transforming and strengthening power of the Holy Spirit. . . .

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*Before I write a word further, I beseech thee to think not that it is thy wife but a friend now that writes to thee.* ***I hope thou hast freely given up thy wife and children to God, who hath said in Jeremiah 49:11, “Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive, and let thy widow trust in me.”*** *Thy Maker will be my husband, and a Father to thy children. O that the Lord would keep thee from having one troubled thought for thy relations. I desire freely to give thee up into thy Father’s hands, and not only look upon it as a crown of glory for thee to die for Christ, but as an honor to me that I should have a husband to leave for Christ.*

*I dare not speak to thee, nor have a thought within my own heart of my own unspeakable loss, but wholly keep my eye fixed upon thy inexpressible and inconceivable gain. Thou leavest but a sinful, mortal wife to be everlastingly married to the Lord of glory. Thou leavest but children, brothers, and sisters to go to the Lord Jesus, thy eldest Brother. Thou leavest friends on earth to go to the enjoyment of saints and angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect in glory. Thou dost but leave earth for heaven and changest a prison for a palace.* ***And if natural affections should begin to arise, I hope that the spirit of grace that is within thee will quell them, knowing that all things here below are but dung and dross in comparison of those things that are above.***  *I know thou keepest thine eye fixed on the hope of glory, which makes thy feet trample on the loss of earth.*

*My dear, I know God hath not only prepared glory for thee, and thee for it, but I am persuaded that He will sweeten the way for thee to come to the enjoyment of it. When thou art putting thy clothes on that morning, O think, “I am now putting on my wedding garments to go to be married to my everlasting Redeemer.”*

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*When the messenger of death comes to thee, let him not seem dreadful to thee, but look on him as a messenger that brings thee tidings of eternal life. When thou goest up the scaffold, think (as thou saidst to me) that it is but thy fiery chariot to carry thee up to thy Father’s house.*

*And when thy layest thy precious head down to recieve thy Father’s stroke, remember what thou saidst to me: Though thy head was severed from thy body, yet in a moment thy soul should be united to thy Head, the Lord Jesus, in heaven. And though it may seem something bitter, that by the hands of men we are parted a little sooner than otherwise we might have been, yet let us consider that it is the decree and will of our Father, and it will not be long before we shall enjoy one another in heaven again.*

*Let us comfort one another with these sayings. Be comforted, my dear heart. It is but a little stroke and thou shalt be there where the weary shall be at rest and the wicked shall cease from troubling. Remember that thou mayest eat thy dinner with bitter herbs, yet thou shalt have a sweet supper with Christ that night. My dear, by what I write unto thee, I do not hereby undertake to teach thee; for these comforts I have received from the Lord by thee.* ***I will write no more, nor trouble thee any further, but commit thee into the arms of God with whom before long thee and I shall be.***

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*Farewell, my dear. I shall never see thy face more till we both behold the face of the Lord Jesus at that great day.*

* With these word Mary Love, though 9 months pregnant, was telling her husband to not think of her or their children again. She did want him to be distracted by earthly concerns. In quoting Jeremiah 49:11 she wanted him to be assured that God would care for them and that she wished him to remain focused solely on the Lord.
  + These are truly words of true, abiding faith.
* On the morning of his execution, Christopher wrote a final letter to his wife. It reads, in part . . .

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*My Dearest Beloved,*

*I am now going to my long home, yet I must write a word before I go hence and shall be seen no more. It is to beg thee to be comforted in my gain and not to be troubled in thy loss. Labor to suppress thy inward fears now that thou art under outward sorrows. As thy outward sufferings abound, let they consolations in Christ also abound.*

*I can write no more; farewell my dear, farewell, farewell. My dear, I beseech thee to be satisfied. My heart is greatly comforted in God. I can quietly submit to the good pleasure of His will, and I hope thou dost so also. I am delivered by the determinate counsel of God; the will of the Lord be done.*

*These are the last words written by thy dying yet comforted husband.*

* Here, in this exchange between Mary and Christopher Love we see what true, abiding faith looks like. And we see what it means to ***rejoice always***.
  + Even in the midst of this terrible trial, both Mary and Christopher are encouraging one another to be strengthened in their faith and to rejoice in their circumstances.
* For the Thessalonians, to whom Paul writes, they also knew the reality of suffering for the name of Christ. And while they were persevering in their faith, Paul writes to exhort them and spur them on to greater faith and reliance upon the Lord.
* While most of us may never be called upon by God to suffer for Him to the degree that so many of our brothers and sisters throughout history have, it is possible that some of us may be.
  + So, my exhortation to you this morning is, on the day when the Lord calls upon you to suffer for His name, I pray that you will emulate our brothers and sisters who have gone before you and ***rejoice always***.
  + As Paul exhorts in Philippians 4:4 . . .

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***Philippians 4:4— Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!***