

~Other Speakers A-F: John A. Broadus:

Rejoice in the Lord alway! and again I say rejoice. Philippians 4:4

A person who reads this letter of Paul to the Philippian Christians will hardly fail to observe, how often the apostle speaks of joy; how often he alludes to his own sources of joy; how often he bids his brethren to rejoice. There must be significance in this. The apostle Paul was not a man to use many words without meaning; and that divine Spirit, that guided him in what he wrote, never speaks for naught. When we read again and again injunctions like this, "Finally my brethren rejoice in the Lord," or "in all things by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, make your requests known," etc.; or when he says, "for your furtherance and joy of faith," "that your rejoicing may be more abundant," "I joy and rejoice with you all; for this cause also do ye joy and rejoice with me"; or, in the text, bids them "rejoice in the Lord alway," repeating the injunction with unusual and very marked emphasis, "and again I say, rejoice"-when we read all these passages and more than these, in one very brief letter, we may be assured that the writer was very earnest in his own rejoicing, and was quite anxious that his brethren should rejoice too, and was certain that they had ample cause of rejoicing.

It is well too to observe what was the condition of him who thus constantly tells of joyfulness, and what the condition of those upon whom he urged the duty of rejoicing and thankfulness. When Paul wrote to the Christians at Philippi, he was a prisoner at Rome; liable not merely to be tried upon the accusations made against him by the Jews (which were not likely to condemn him), but liable also to punishment for preaching a new religion which was not tolerated by the laws of the state, and more especially since it had a direct tendency to break down the religion of the state. He knew all this-he knew that his life was in danger; and yet still he rejoices, for he is confident that whether by his life or his death, Christ will be glorified, and he feels that to him (as he says) "to live is Christ, and to die, gain." He can rejoice too that his imprisonment has been the means of drawing attention to the religion he preaches, and that many have waxed bolder in preaching the gospel by reason of his bonds.

And thus he, who was a prisoner, and could not know his fate, yet found abundant matter of thankfulness and rejoicing. The Philippian Christians, to whom he wrote, had to bear more than ordinary trials. The apostle himself, when first preaching there, had been grievously mistreated; and the zeal and hatred of the Jews had made them continue to wage an unremitting warfare against the few disciples there of the true faith. They had adversaries, they had opposition, they had persecutions. Yet Paul says, "rejoice." Surely, then, when we see an apostle rejoicing in bonds, and again and again saying "rejoice" to a feeble body of injured and persecuted men, we may know that thanksgiving and rejoicing is a great Christian duty, and an exalted Christian privilege. Therefore, I desire to speak now of Christian thankfulness and Christian joy.

An unthankful and complaining spirit is an abiding sin against God, and a cause of almost continual unhappiness; and yet how common such a spirit is. How prone we seem to be to forget the good that life knows, and remember and brood over its evil-to forget its joys, and think only of its sorrows-to forget thankfulness, and remember only to complain. The ox will graze all day in green pastures, and know of nothing but the moment's enjoyment; and many a man will enjoy the blessings that are so spread out before him, the pleasures that are so thickly strewed along his path, and never have one moment's thought of the bountiful Being that gave them, that good and gracious One who is "kind to the unthankful and the evil." But then let trouble come-want or suffering, disappointment or anxiety, remorse or dread, and how soon he grows dissatisfied with life, how soon he complains of his hard lot, and murmurs against the God that made him.

Is it not lamentable that men will never thank God for the countless blessings he confers upon them, and then remember him only to complain of the evils which they have brought upon themselves, and which are never half so great as their misconduct deserves? And if in those who care nothing for him that made them and preserves and blesses them, those who neglect or hate him, this conduct is so strange, how is it with those who have yet more to thank God for, who are his children by the new and spiritual birth, who are made heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ? And yet, my brethren, how many an earnest Christian is grievously wanting in thankfulness for his Heavenly Father's goodness, and suffers himself often to complain and be peevish and fretful at the little trials of life; forgetting how much more there is even in the midst of trials, how much more joy than sorrow in his lot, and forgetting too the command of him who has said, "In every thing give thanks." We need to watch and pray concerning this disposition. We need to strive to change our ways of thinking and feeling about it. Let a man be reminded of the many blessings God had given him, and he will say at once, "Ah, but this one trouble destroys all my happiness, mars all my enjoyment"-and he will turn away his eyes from everything pleasant around him, and gaze moodily or fretfully at this source of trouble. If he does not carry it so far as this, he will be sure to let this discomfort prevent all thankfulness. Now I say we need to

change here. Our feeling ought to be, that though we have troubles, yet these shall not prevent our being glad and thankful at the many blessings, the more numerous and rich and undeserved blessings we enjoy. "In every thing give thanks." Thank God for your enjoyments-they are the gift of his goodness.

Do you really, my Christian hearer, look upon the blessings, I mean the temporal blessings, you enjoy as the gift of God? Do you really thank him with the heart, even when your lips are uttering words of thankfulness? My brethren, I have sometimes feared that with many of us there is three times a day a solemn mockery practiced. How often it happens that a family gather time after time around their table, spread with that abundant and pleasing food which, in the good providence of God they have been enabled to provide, and seem to thank their Heavenly Father for these blessings, and yet they do not thank him-and yet no heart of all those gathered there feels one emotion of gratitude to God. The grace before meals is necessary and proper, they believe, but neither he that speaks again nor they that hear again the oft-repeated words have any real feeling of thankfulness at all. I do not say this is so with all-I do not say it is always so with any; but is it not too often so? And if here, when you are professing to give thanks, you feel no thankfulness, alas how must it be in those unnumbered hours when you neither think nor speak of gratitude.

I say then that with reference to temporal blessings, to earthly good, to the ordinary course of affairs in life I fear you are sadly lacking, my Christian brethren, in the gratitude to God which you ought to cultivate and cherish. It is a poor return to make for that goodness which crowns your life with so many blessings, to be complaining constantly because something goes wrong. You say to a child who complains of what is given him, that he ought to be glad it is so good; it is far better than he deserves. And so might it be said to every professed child of God-however few comparatively may be your advantages and however many comparatively your troubles, you ought to be thankful it is no worse, you ought to remember that it is far better than you deserve.

But the rejoicing contemplated by the text amounts to very much more than gratitude for temporal mercies. Indeed, ample as I have tried to show is the ground for gratitude on the score of earthly blessings, and sadly remiss as we are in that we do not cultivate more of the spirit of thankfulness for present good, yet all these are at last but our Father's meaner gifts, and all such sources of pleasure are as nothing when compared with that higher rejoicing to which the Christian is here invited. It is to rejoice on account of spiritual blessings.

I know that in calling upon Christians to rejoice over their religious privileges and blessings, one is met by the danger of spiritual pride. I remember the Pharisee, who thanked God (at least he said he did-I doubt if he did really feel any thankfulness at all) that he was better than other men. I have not forgotten how sinful a feeling like this must be-how unworthy of creatures such as we are, who have no good in us, whose righteousness must be altogether the gift of another. This very consideration is sufficient to counteract every tendency to spiritual pride. If a man really is a Christian, he knows that all the good in him is of God; he knows that he has to thank God for every privilege he enjoys, and he cannot deserve credit for that which is the gift of another-and his gratitude to the giver would better make him humble than proud. No, the true Christian may rejoice over what the Lord has made him, without forgetting that he owes it to the Lord-"by the grace of God I am what I am." In the world, the proudest men are commonly those who have least to be proud of, and so in religion the man who has much of it is in very little danger of being proud thereof, for that religion whose essence is humility will always teach him to "rejoice with trembling."

I repeat then that the text looks properly to a spiritual rejoicing, and on the score of spiritual blessings. There are many reasons why Christians should rejoice, should rejoice in the Lord. Here are some of them.

I bid you rejoice, my dear hearer, because you have at least been awakened to a sense of your sins-that you are not a careless, nor a hardened sinner. It is a good thing for a man to be aware of his condition, because he is then more likely to seek relief. if a man finds he is in danger, there is hope that he will strive to escape. If one knows that he is diseased, and feels it, there is hope that he will seek the physician. And the fact that a man feels that he is a sinner shows that he is beginning to have more correct ideas of what sin is, and what holiness is, of what is his own character, and what that character ought to be. An awakened sinner is no more free from sin than he was before. But then he is more likely to seek the Saviour and thus be forgiven and purified. An old writer has said that a bucket which is being drawn out of the well is not felt to be heavy, till it begins to rise out of the water; that a man who is under water does not feel the weight of the tons that may be above him, so much as he would feel the weight of one little tubful of water on his head when he is out. So when a man feels the weight of his sin it seems as if he is not so wholly immersed in sin as he was before; he is coming out of it.

It is a lamentable thing that so many men and women are living without seeming ever to think of their being sinners. They not only enjoy God's bounty without ever thanking him, but they incur his displeasure without

fearing him, they heap up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath without taking time to think what they are doing. Do you want to find the most lamentable, the most pitiable and deplorable spectacle on earth? Do not tell me of one who thinks he will soon recover and live many years, when consumption has fastened its grasp upon him and tomorrow he must die. Do not tell me of him who sails gaily down the quickening current and forgets the cataract that is before him. But come and look upon the careless and reckless sinner, who is going on without one moment's thought to eternal death; who is standing upon the slippery places of earthly life, while the fiery billows of death and perdition roll beneath his feet, and yet does not seem to know where he is; who has in truth nothing before him but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries, and yet moves on as if the present were all bright and he had nothing to fear. But there is the hardened sinner-who has eyes that seeing see not, and ears that hearing hear not-who hardened the heart till now nothing can move, till God's wrath cannot alarm, nor his love attract, till his threatenings and his invitations fall alike unheeded on the ear, till the story of the bleeding, dying love of Jesus can never move. Oh, may God in his mercy deliver you, my dear hearer, from being a hardened sinner! Whatever else befall you, God forbid that you should be a hardened sinner! And my brethren I say I rejoice, and I bid you rejoice, that you are at least awakened-that you are not careless, not hardened.

But there is greater cause still for rejoicing. My Christian brother, can you not rejoice that you have faith in Christ and enjoyment of religion, communion with God and hope of glory? You have faith in Christ. You have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write. You have found him who was exalted a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel and remission of sins. You have found him who was lifted up to draw all men unto him. You know him who is the chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely. You have traced out something of the unsearchable riches of Christ. You have found the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price. You have learned that there is balm in Gilead, that there is a great Physician there; he has checked your fearful, mortal malady, and you shall live. You have looked to the brazen serpent, you are healed. You have sprinkled your door post with the blood of God's atoning Lamb, and the angel of destruction will pass you by. You have fled to the city of refuge, and the destroyer cannot come near you. You have laid your sins by faith on your substitute and he has borne them away into the wilderness. You have bathed in the fountain that was opened in the house of King David for sin and for uncleanness, and the defilement of guilt has been washed away. You have brought to Jesus the writing that bound you as a servant of sin, and he has annulled it by nailing it to his cross.

In a word, you believe on the Saviour, and to you that believe he is precious. And my brother, if all these things be true of you, if Jesus is yours and you are his, have you not cause for rejoicing and praise and thanksgiving and love? We are told that on one occasion the disciples whom Jesus had sent out, returned with rejoicing, saying, "Lord, even the devils are subject to us through thy name." And the Master replied, "Rejoice not in this, that the devils are subject unto you, but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven." And, my brethren, if you be true believers in Jesus, you may well rejoice that your names are written in heaven. It may amount to but little that your names are written on an earthly record as Christians, for that does not prove it true; a man may have a name to live and be dead. But if they are written in that blessed book, the Lamb's book of life, then may you rejoice indeed.

Again, you have the enjoyment of religious privileges. You have within your reach continually those delights which religion alone can afford. You can feed on the bread of life which came down from heaven, and drink sweet draughts from the wellspring of salvation. You can read the blessed teachings of God's holy word, you can walk to the house of God in company with those you love, and hear the sound of the glorious gospel, and rejoice that being mixed with faith in you that hear it, the word preached profits you. You can gather together for united prayer and feel that you sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. You can lift your voices together in hymning the praises of your glorious Redeemer. And is there not in privileges like these matter for great and continual rejoicing?

Then you can enjoy communion with God. My hearer, have you ever felt what is meant by communion with God? Or is it only a something you have read of in the Bible and heard of from the pulpit, without understanding it? If you be a real, earnest Christian, you have felt what it is. You are able to call God Father. Although by sin men are separated from him and can look to him only as an offended Lord and a righteously angry Judge, yet you may rejoice at knowing that you have been adopted into the household of faith, and have received that spirit of adoption whereby you cry, "Abba, Father," and can in humble faith and earnest confidence lift your prayer unto him who is our Father in heaven. You can pray without ceasing unto him. As you hunger and thirst after righteousness, you can go to him and know that you shall be filled. As you feel yourself weak, you can hope for strength from him.

It is especially a privilege to pray to him alone, to commune with him in secret-to enter into your closet and shut

the door and pray to your Father which is in secret, as knowing that your Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward you openly. You can pour out there before him your heart's inmost sorrows, your spirit's own peculiar wants. You can wrestle there alone with your God, for the blessings you need, and know that asking you shall receive. You can confess every sin, of word or deed, of thought or desire, and ask for forgiveness through the Saviour in whom you trust. You can pour out your soul there in earnest supplication for those you love who love not Jesus; you can spread out all their sad case before your God, and implore him to stop them and turn them and rescue and save them. Oh, the privilege of private prayer, the joy and peace that flow to the true believer from personal, spiritual communion with the Father of his spirit!

But there is not only faith in the Saviour, and the enjoyment of religious privileges, and communion with God, but as if these were not enough to make the heart overflow with joy, we have more—there is the hope of glory. It is a bright and beautiful change when the water of some little muddy pool is drunk up by the sun, leaving behind all its earthly defilements, and when it appears again in rain-drops is clothed, as the sunbeams shine through it, in all the bright hues of the rainbow. But this is nothing, compared with the change from a sin-defiled dweller on the earth, to a glorified inmate of the Paradise of God. How blessed will be that change! when they who have entered the strait gate and walked the narrow way through the troubles and trials of earth, shall pass through the pearly gates and tread the golden streets of the New Jerusalem, the glorious city of our God; when they who have groaned in sickness and sighed in sorrow, they who have languished in pain and borne the agony of death, shall pass into that blest abode where "sickness and sorrow, pain and death, are felt and feared no more."

Christian brother, I bid you read humbly, and yet rejoicingly, the soul-inspiring descriptions which are given us in the book of Revelation—the descriptions of the glorious city, the river and the tree of life, the robes of white, the harps of gold, the chorus of redeemed spirits, the song of Moses and the Lamb—I cannot tell what all these mean, but I know they mean and are intended to mean, all that is glorious and gladdening and bright and beautiful. Read it, humbly and thankfully, and let your heart swell with devout rejoicing, and your bosom heave with humble gratitude to him who has "given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace," the hope of immortality and eternal life, the hope of heaven, the hope of glory.

Happy art thou, O Christian, if such joys, such privileges, such cheering, gladdening hopes, are indeed experienced. How much our Heavenly Father has given you of temporal good, how much more of spiritual enjoyment and soul-sustaining hope. How much the Lord of life and glory has done on your behalf. Go tell one that is able to understand you, of his parents' tenderness and care; of his father's yearning fondness, his mother's unutterable love; of all their anxiety and uneasiness and privation and suffering on his account, and if he is not moved to love and gratitude, you call him a thankless wretch. Has not God loved you with more than a father's, more than a mother's love? Has not Jesus suffered for you unspeakable anguish and agony, has he not died for you? Will you be thankful for all goodness and mercy? When he, who has done so much for you, who has given you all those exalted privileges and blessed joys and glorious hopes on which we have been dwelling, when he bids you rejoice in him, rejoice always in him. Cultivate a spirit of thanksgiving, a spirit of rejoicing, and devote your life to his service, that all your life should be one ceaseless song of joy, one constant hymn of praise, "to him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father!" "Finally, brethren, rejoice in the Lord."