



**THE SOURCE OF OUR JOY**  
**Philippians 4:4-13**

The entire body of Christ has had their faith journey strengthened by the hymns of Charles Wesley. They have been a source of joy and solace and assurance.

However, most of you know little of the suffering, adversity and difficult circumstances he knew and experienced in life. Charles Wesley had a source of joy no circumstance could alter. Charles Wesley was raised in a very large family. His mother gave birth to nineteen children. Only ten of them lived. You can imagine living in a poor parish rectory with all those persons. His older brother, John, was the more outspoken and famous Wesley.

Charles was a bachelor for the first 39 years of his life. At the age of 39, he fell deeply in love with a beautiful young lady named Sally, who was only 20 years old. He pleaded with the girl's father to be allowed to marry her despite the age difference. The father finally consented.

He was so proud of her. Everywhere they went, he delighted in introducing her as his bride. He was pleased to be seen everywhere with her. After they were married five years, Sally contracted smallpox. This was before the era of modern medicine. She was covered with smallpox from the crown of her head to the bottom of her feet. She hung between life and death for three weeks. Slowly, she recovered from this almost fatal illness. However, the scars of the illness remained. She was disfigured for the rest of her life. People who did not know them personally thought Charles Wesley had married a much older woman.

Charles and Sally had eight children. However, five of them died before their first birthday. Three children survived, Samuel, Sarah, and Charles, Jr.

However, not one of those three children in Charles Wesley's lifetime confessed Jesus Christ as Lord. Only after his death did they accept Christ as their Savior.

Yet, he wrote songs of such hope, joy, praise, and adoration. What was the source of his joy? His source was Christ! It came from a source and reservoir far greater than his own strength. His joy was consistent despite difficult moments in his journey of faith. On every Easter Sunday in this church we sing with great joy that marvelous hymn, **CHRIST THE LORD IS RISEN TODAY**, Alleluia, amen. Charles Wesley testifies in this and other hymns that our Lord Jesus Christ is indeed risen and

reigning, that the Lamb is upon the throne. He wished he had a thousand tongues (not just one) to sing our great Redeemer's praise, the glories of my God and King.

Today, I want to share three insights on how we maintain the joy of our salvation as well.

### **FIRST, PAUL KEPT HIS FOCUS ON GOD – AND NOT HIS CIRCUMSTANCES.**

The book of Philippians is the Joy book and the Joy manual of the word of God. It was written by the apostle Paul from a prison cell, not from a plush, hotel suite. In this splendid book, Paul urges the believers at Philippi twice to rejoice in the Lord. In a deep, dark prison cell this letter shines with a radiance which the darkness of the moment cannot overcome. In **Philippians 4:4**, which we read for our lesson today, he repeats the words twice in one sentence by writing "**Rejoice, again I say rejoice.**" Re- is a prefix which means to go back to the original. The word rejoice commands us to go back to God's original joy in creation when the morning stars sang with glory at the action of God's work. We are to go back to our day of redemption and salvation. The joy of the Christian is not a passing quality based on our emotions but on what God has done for us.

Occasionally, a person will share with me "Pastor, I don't feel saved." Your salvation in Christ is not based on your feelings or emotions – but on an action and agreement between the Father and the Son – sealed by the Holy Spirit. You work **out** your salvation – but never **for** it.

That is why the cross has the place of highest honor in this church and every church. That is why we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith.

### **SECONDLY, PAUL HAS A SOURCE OF JOY GREATER THAN THE SOURCE OF HIS DESPAIR.**

Paul testifies that the power of joy can help transfigure the totality of the human experience in our journey of faith.

Paul is always talking about joy. "**Rejoice in the Lord, again I say, rejoice.**" In the few letters that Paul wrote in the New Testament, there are twenty-four references to joy. And there are eighteen references or uses of the word "rejoice." Forty-two times, then, Paul mentions joy. That constitutes a focus and fixation. Paul says over and over again that the result of seeing what God has done for us in Jesus Christ is joy. So rejoice. If your life is filled with joy, he says, it'll show.

The Apostle Paul does not discount the reasons for defeat and despair. Remember, he has been bitten by snakes, ridiculed in the public arenas of government, shipwrecked, and had written letters to help Christians and churches to keep from self-destructing by fighting among themselves.

There is no way for Paul or any of us here today to deny that life does have disappointments, bruises, and despair. However, Paul wants us to know that these emotions do not necessarily have the last word. Paul further writes in another letter that the suffering of the present moment will not compare to the glory that is yet to be revealed to us.

The text really means to let God's great joy in Jesus Christ continue to flow through and not let the 'pipeline of life' get clogged with despair, disappointment, and desperation. Continue to open your life to the healing depth of God's victory over sin, evil, and death in the Christ event.

All of this implies however, that we are continuing to cultivate a living, breathing, vital relationship with God. It is not some vague commitment made years ago that has withered away. We are not serving God in an 'advisory capacity.' We are straining forward to win the high prize in Christ Jesus allowed.

Paul continues to explain that we are to live out of that joy and because of it. We are further counseled to have no anxiety about anything. The word anxiety, according to Webster's Dictionary, means "a tightness of the chest, brought on by dread of something." However, if his eye is on the sparrow – why are you worrying?

Mary and I have visited some of the great cathedrals and castles of England and Scotland. We visited the famous castle in Edinburgh. The guide shared how this castle had withstood many a siege in its day.

The castle first had a steep outside wall with strategic fortifications. If you got that far – you had to navigate your way through a series of inner walls and passages before you actually entered the castle.

Then you had to pass through two other areas before you reached the living quarters of the Royal Family. The residence itself had access to a source of fresh water and food supply enabling them to survive a long siege. This is exactly what can happen for the believers who have his vital, ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ. There is a source and reservoir which will never run dry – because Christ is sufficient in all things.

This is what allowed Paul and Charles Wesley and countless others to withstand the siege of the Evil One upon their lives as well. The hymn writer said,

**"In seasons of distress and grief,  
My soul has often found relief  
And oft escaped the Tempter's snare  
By thy return sweet hour of prayer."**

Our joy is based on our relationship to God. Joy is the echo of God's life within us according to Joseph Marmion. If we have confessed Jesus Christ as Lord and

Savior of our lives, then God has the ability to grant it to us. God's check of love will never come back stamped "**Insufficient Funds.**" Remember, the **joy of the Lord is my strength.** Not the joy of Eric S. Ritz, or the joy of the Internal Revenue Service, or the joy of the world. But the joy of our Lord. The Psalmist declares, "Weeping may tarry for the night – but joy always comes in the morning." Darkness always gives way to light for the believer. Crucifixions always give way to the resurrecting power of God.

God has this long history of taking our most trying moments and transforming them into moments of growth and trust. He delights in transforming moments that Satan meant for our harm – and using them as moments for our benefit and blessing.

The devil might try to shut you off from a sense of joy – but not from the joy of the Lord. God is interested in all of you gathered here today being people who are full of joy. Joy to the world, the Lord has come. Let earth receive her king.

### **LASTLY, JOY IS THE MOST INFALLIBLE PROOF OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD.**

I do not know where our ideas and concepts of a joyless religion come from. It is certainly not found in the Old or New Testaments. In the Old Testament record we find that the Hebrew people are celebrating with music, dancing, eating, drinking, and joy-filled festivals. It even declares that David danced with joy before the Lord.

From the New Testament we find that our Lord's ministry is filled with a sense of joy. The people flocked to hear Him because of his joy-filled messages. The children loved Him – and children don't like killjoys. He even prevented a Jewish wedding from being ruined when the supply of wine ran out. When He told what many consider the greatest story ever shared of the parable of the Prodigal Son – what happens at the end of this marvelous story? Would you believe a celebration of Joy?

I love the story told of the young boy who each day entered one of the great museums in Europe. He would always stop and look at one of the famous paintings of the Lord Jesus Christ hanging in the museum. This pattern continued from weeks into months. The guards became suspicious of his activities. The guards finally cornered him one day and asked why he came each day to the museum to see this picture. The little boy replied, "I just look at Jesus – and Jesus looks at me – and that makes all the difference in the world."

How right the little boy was. In **John 20:20** we read the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. They were not glad when they saw themselves – but when they saw the Lord. The real miracle of life is not that you and I love Jesus – but that **Jesus loves us and looks for us.** That is the source of our joy.

**Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say, rejoice.  
The joy of the Lord is my strength.**

Amen and amen.

Reverend Eric S. Ritz  
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