



CHRISTADELPHIAN ISOLATION LEAGUE

EXHORTATION

Date: 11th October 2020

SECTION LEADER:

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Readings: **1 Chronicles 28, Ezekiel 37, John 2, 3**

Be Joyful Always

What does God want us to do? If we could sum-up what He desires from us in one sentence, what would it be? The answer is in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians: *"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks."* (**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18** NKJV).

Rejoice, pray and give thanks (and do them all the time), that's what God wants from us. These are three simple things that we can carry with us all week. So simple we can carry them with us until Christ returns. As Paul says, this is what God wants from us. *"...this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."* (**1 Thessalonians 5:18**).

Joy, prayer and thanks are a theme in this letter. In **chapter 1** Paul thanks God because the Thessalonians showed joy, despite affliction (**1 Thessalonians 1:2, 6**). In **chapter 2** Paul says that the Thessalonians are his joy: *"you are our glory and joy."* (**1 Thessalonians 2:20**). This continues into **chapter 3** when he thanks God for the joy that they give him as he prays all the time for them.

"For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?" (**1 Thessalonians 3:9, 10**).

We may at times think that the request to rejoice, pray and give thanks all the time is too idealistic. There are lots of problems and issues that make this too difficult. However, the same was true for our brothers and sisters in Thessalonica. Paul had established a small community there, in, perhaps only a few weeks. **Acts 17** tells us how Jason and some other brothers were dragged before the city authorities to explain what they were doing; Paul and Silas having to be smuggled out of the city at night. We know that the trouble continued after Paul left because Paul says: *"In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know."* (**1 Thessalonians 3:4** NIV). They had plenty of reasons not to be joyful and thankful and yet they were.

So how do we manage to be joyful, thankful and prayerful all the time despite the troubles of this life? The lesson from the Thessalonians, who were asked to show these qualities, is that it depends on how you look at your life.

Joy in Greek is 'chara'. From the same root comes 'charis', which is grace, the undeserved gift. So, Joy is something that comes from being given a gift. The word *"thanks"* in **1 Thessalonians 5:18** also has the same root. We give thanks because we have been given a gift. Since one is a consequence of the other, joy and thankfulness will come if we look for the gift, the gift being the forgiveness of our sins through God's good grace. If we are not feeling joyful, is it because we don't feel God's grace? The two are inextricably linked. If we appreciate God's grace in saving us, then we will feel joy & thankfulness.

It is very similar to Jesus' words to Simon the Pharisee when he rebuked the woman who broke down in tears at Jesus feet: *"...her sins, which are many, are forgiven: for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."* (**Luke 7:47**). It wasn't that Simon was less of a sinner, it was just that the woman realised the extent of her sins, so her love was great, and therefore so was her joy and thankfulness.

The more we appreciate the extent of our sins and hence the size of the gift we've been given, the more joyful and thankful we will be. However, if our focus is on the things of this life, and we value these things more than the forgiveness of our sins, then our joy will only be fleeting. This sort of joy will come and go

with the ups and downs of life. Whereas our need for forgiveness and the associated joy when we receive God's grace is something we will never lose.

David knew this. **Psalm 51** records his thoughts and emotions when he realised he had sinned concerning Bathsheba. It was at this point that he truly grasped the size of the gift of forgiveness; which is why we see joy throughout this Psalm. David explains that joy and rejoicing came because he had been washed and cleansed: *"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness that the bones which you have broken may rejoice."* (**Psalm 51:7, 8**).

The Hebrew word translated *"rejoice"* here literally means to spin. This is such a powerful joy that the emotion breaks from your heart and causes you to spin around. David calls it: *"the joy of your salvation."* (**v.12**). This is a joy that will never leave us as long as we remember we need to be saved.

So why is it we don't feel this joy all the time? There are two possible reasons; one is because we feel overwhelmed with guilt because we cannot stop sinning, and the other is the distractions of this life.

Let's briefly consider both these problems with a view to conquering them;

- Guilt and unworthiness are useful tools to bring us to repentance and sorrow. But that is only what they should be, tools and not a permanent fixture. Once we have come to God through Jesus in repentance, our sins are washed away, no matter what they are. If we are covered by Christ, then what God sees when He looks at us is the perfection of the Lord Jesus. We have been forgiven, and it is God's good pleasure to give us the kingdom. As one brother wrote, 'guilt and sorrow are like pain. It is useful in that it tells you that you have a problem, but when the wound is healed, the pain is no longer needed.
- The other thing that could be dampening our joy is the distractions of this life. In the parable of the sower you will remember that the seed sown among thorns was choked by the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches and it became unfruitful.

So, to prevent our joy from withering, we need to grow a strong root, deep into God's word. If we are not rooted in the Bible our joy that we have isn't really joy; it will just be happiness which comes and goes depending on the circumstances of life. But real and sincere joy is different, it is a joy rooted deeply in the Bible, a joy that comes from understanding what we have been forgiven and looking forward to the kingdom.

But is there anything that can remove this joy from our lives? There are a few verses in **Romans 8** where Paul answers this question:

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (**Romans 8:31-35**).

Paul is telling us there is nothing, absolutely nothing, that can separate us from God's grace. What a powerful reminder to us to be rooted firmly in God's word, a word that sustains us even in times of trouble. Let us come now to remember the great price that has been paid so that we might have that opportunity of being joyful forever, through the sacrifice of God's beloved son.

Brother Phil Arnold: Birmingham Hall Green UK 11.10.20