

## Joy

*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! (Philippians 4:4, NIV)*

Surely, everyone wants life to be full of joy. Inevitably, life has its downs, but that is not the way we want it to be. There are many ways in which Christians are different from the people of the world, but this is a desire held by all. And yet, what brings this joy? This can show differences between us.

Many things in life bring joy. Common joys of life are shared by Christians and non-Christians alike. This, however, is a study of things that bring joy to Christians, some more ways in which we are different from the people of the world about us.

One does not read far into the New Testament before coming across a statement of Jesus that makes very little sense to the worldly minded. But to the one whose heart and treasure is in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21) this makes perfect sense:

*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:11-12, NIV)*

In one way or another, all Christians will face persecution of various kinds. Sometimes it is facing ridicule and insult, sometimes and in some places, much more serious trials must be overcome.

For one thing, the previous verse teaches that the expectation of heaven is enough to make us rejoice in the face of any trial. We will look at this further in a moment.

But there is also the realization that we are sharing in a life that was known to the prophets. Just as they suffered, we suffer. It is always a joy to discover that we are in good company.

And it is not just the company of the prophets that we share. By suffering for Christ, we share in the suffering of Christ himself. We are encouraged to take great joy in this:

*But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.*

**(1 Peter 4:13)**

Many people are very happy if they can travel to the land of Palestine and walk the paths of Jesus. We should feel at least as honored if we are able to walk in the steps of Jesus in faithfulness to God. It was just this honor, this worthiness, to follow Jesus' example in trials that gave the apostles great joy in their day:

*And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. **(Acts 5:41)***

*Finally, suffering for Christ is a source of joy to us because of the stronger character that it builds within us:*

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,*

*because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.*

**(James 1:2-3, NIV)**

Though it is hard to obtain, perseverance and steadfastness are essential to living a life pleasing to God in the face of many trials.

There are also other special reasons for a Christian to rejoice while on this Earth. If we use the example of the apostles we will be joyful because of the many people that we know who are striving to do what is right. All of

us can look about us at those who are trying to obey God and be filled with joy:

*For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy. (1 Thes. 2:19-20)*

It is so grand to look about us and be edified by the faithfulness of so many other people, both past and present, who want to go to heaven themselves and who do all that is in their power to help others go as well: *For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother. (Philemon 1:7)*

This thought is nowhere summed up better than in one of the last books of the Bible: *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. (3 John 1:4)*

It is not just the faithfulness of others that should give us joy. Our own faithfulness is a reason to rejoice. If we are faithful to God we can have joy in that, no matter what other state we are in. Job in all his troubles knew this joy: Then I would still have this consolation--my joy in unrelenting pain—that I had not denied the words of the Holy One. (Job 6:10, NIV)

This is not a prideful rejoicing in our own accomplishments, but an expression of faith in God to fulfill his promises and reward those who cling to him: Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven. (Luke 10:20)

And this takes us back, really, to the first verse and major reason to rejoice in the Lord. No matter how hard life may become, we can have never-ending joy in the fact that we shall receive the reward of heaven at the end of our lives: By whom [Jesus] also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:2)

And this is just what kept the apostle Paul going at the end of his life, before being executed by the Roman authorities. He could look back at his life and the promises of God and find undying joy in what lay ahead for him, and what lies ahead for all of us if we hold fast to God's word: I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. ([2 Tim. 4:7-8, NIV](#))