

Philippians 4:4-7

by St. John Chrysostom

The sermon emphasizes the importance of rejoicing in the Lord always, living a virtuous life, and striving for peace with God and with others.

Scripture: Psalm 120:7, Proverbs 26:27, Matthew 5:4, Matthew 5:9, Philippians 4:4

Topics: "Christian Joy", "Spiritual Peace"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of rejoicing in the Lord always, even in the midst of trials and suffering, emphasizing the peace that comes from prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving to God. He contrasts the teachings of Christ and Paul regarding mourning and laughter, highlighting the deeper spiritual meanings behind them. Chrysostom encourages believers to focus on virtuous and honorable things, to be at peace with all, and to imitate God by being peacemakers, as this leads to freedom from sin and a closer relationship with God.

Transcript

Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, Rejoice. Let your forbearance be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts through Christ Jesus.

Blessed are they that mourn, and woe unto them that laugh Matthew 5:4; Luke 6:25, says Christ. How then says Paul, Rejoice in the Lord always? Woe to them that laugh, said Christ, the laughter of this world which arises from the things which are present. He blessed also those that mourn, not simply for the loss of relatives, but those who are pricked at heart, who mourn their own faults, and take count of their own sins, or even those of others. This joy is not contrary to that grief, but from that grief it too is born. For he who grieves for his own faults, and confesses them, rejoices. Moreover, it is possible to grieve for our own sins, and yet to rejoice in Christ. Since then they were afflicted by their sufferings, for to you it is given not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him Philippians 1:29, therefore he says, Rejoice in the Lord. For this can but mean, If you exhibit such a life that you may rejoice. Or when your communion with God is not hindered, rejoice. Or else the word in may stand for with: as if he had said, with the Lord. Always; again I will say, Rejoice. These are the words of one who brings comfort; as, for example, he who is in God rejoices always. Yea though he be afflicted, yea whatever he may suffer, such a man always rejoices. Hear what Luke says, that they returned from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they were

counted worthy to be scourged for His name. Acts 5:41 If scourging and bonds, which seem to be the most grievous of all things, bring forth joy, what else will be able to produce grief in us?

Again I will say, Rejoice. Well has he repeated. For since the nature of the things brought forth grief, he shows by repeating, that they should by all means rejoice.

Let your forbearance be known unto all men. He said above, Whose god is the belly, and whose glory is in their shame, and that they mind earthly things. Philippians 3:19 It was probable that they would be at enmity with the wicked; he therefore exhorted them to have nothing in common with them, but to use them with all forbearance, and that not only their brethren, but also their enemies and opposers. The Lord is at hand, in nothing be anxious. For why, tell me? Do they ever rise in opposition? And if you see them living in luxury, why are you in affliction? Already the judgment is near; shortly will they give account of their actions. Are ye in affliction, and they in luxury? But these things shall shortly receive their end. Do they plot against you, and threaten you? In nothing be anxious. The judgment is already at hand, when these things shall be reversed. In nothing be anxious. If you are kindly affected toward those who prepare evil against you, yet it shall not at last turn out to their profit. Already the recompense is at hand, if poverty, if death, if anything else that is terrible be upon you. But in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. There is this for one consolation, the Lord is at hand. And again, I will be with you always, even unto the end of the world. Matthew 28:20 Behold another consolation, a medicine which heals grief, and distress, and all that is painful. And what is this? Prayer, thanksgiving in all things. And so He wills that our prayers should not simply be requests, but thanksgivings too for what we have. For how should he ask for future things, who is not thankful for the past? But in everything by prayer and supplication. Wherefore we ought to give thanks for all things, even for those which seem to be grievous, for this is the part of the truly thankful man. In the other case the nature of the things demands it; but this springs from a grateful soul, and one earnestly affected toward God. God acknowledges these prayers, but others He knows not. Offer up such prayers as may be acknowledged; for He disposes all things for our profit, though we know it not. And this is a proof that it greatly profits, namely, that we know it not. And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus. What means this? The peace of God which He has wrought toward men, surpasses all understanding. For who could have expected, who could have hoped, that such good things would have come? They exceed all man's understanding, not his speech alone. For His enemies, for those who hated Him, for those who determined to turn themselves away, for these, he refused not to deliver up His Only Begotten Son, that He might make peace with us. This peace then, i.e. the reconciliation, the love of God, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts.

For this is the part of a teacher, not only to exhort, but also to pray, and to assist by supplication, that they may neither be overwhelmed by temptations, nor carried about by deceit. As if he had said, May He who has delivered you in such sort as mind cannot comprehend, may He Himself guard you, and secure you, so that you suffer no ill. Either he means this, or that that peace of which Christ says, Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you John 14:27: this shall guard you, for this peace exceeds all man's understanding. How? When he tells us to be at peace with our enemies, with those who treat us unjustly, with those who are at war and enmity toward us; is it not beyond man's understanding? But rather let us look to the former. If the peace surpasses all understanding, much more does God Himself, who gives peace, pass all understanding, not ours only, but also that of Angels, and the Powers above. What means in Christ Jesus? Shall guard us in Him, so that you may remain firm, and not fall from His faith.

Ver. 8. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are just. What is Finally? It stands for, I have said all. It is the word of one that is in haste, and has nothing to do with present things.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Ver. 9. The things which you both learned and received, and heard and saw in me.

What means, whatsoever things are lovely? Lovely to the faithful, lovely to God. Whatsoever things are true. Virtue is really true, vice is falsehood. For the pleasure of it is a falsehood, and its glory is falsehood, and all things of the world are falsehood. Whatsoever things are pure. This is opposed to the words who mind earthly things. Whatsoever things are honorable. This is opposed to the words whose god is their belly. Whatsoever things are just, i.e. says he, whatsoever things are of good report. If there be any virtue, if there be any praise. Here he wills them to take thought of those things too which regard men. Think on these things, says he. Do you see, that he desires to banish every evil thought from our souls; for evil actions spring from thoughts. The things which you both learned and received. This is teaching, in all his exhortations to propose himself for a model: as he says in another place, even as you have us for an ensample. Philippians 3:17 And again here, What things ye learned and received, i.e. have been taught by word of mouth, and heard and saw in me: both in respect of my words and actions and conduct. Do you see, how about everything he lays these commands on us? For since it was not possible to make an accurate enumeration of all things, of our coming in, and going out, and speech, and carriage, and intercourse (for of all these things it is needful that a Christian should have thought), he said shortly, and as it were in a summary, ye heard and saw in me. I have led you forward both by deeds and by words. These things do, not only in words, but do them also. And the God of peace shall be with you, i.e. you shall be in a calm, in great safety, you shall suffer nothing painful, nor contrary to your will. For when we are at peace with Him, and we are so through virtue, much more will He be at peace with us. For He who so loved us, as to show favor to us even against our will, will He not, if He sees us hastening toward Him, Himself yet much more exhibit His love toward us?

Nothing is such an enemy of our nature as vice. And from many things it is evident, how vice is at enmity with us, and virtue friendly toward us. What will you? That I should speak of fornication? It makes men subject to reproach, poor, objects of ridicule, despicable to all, just as enemies treat them. Ofttimes it has involved men in disease and danger; many men have perished or been wounded in behalf of their mistresses. And if fornication produces these things, much rather does adultery. But does almsgiving so? By no means. But as a loving mother sets her son in great propriety, in good order, in good report, and gives him leisure to engage in necessary work, thus almsgiving does not release us nor lead us away from our necessary work, but even renders the soul more wise. For nothing is more foolish than a mistress.

But what do you will? To look upon covetousness? It too treats us like an enemy. And how? It makes us hated by all. It prepares all men to vaunt themselves against us; both those who have been treated unjustly by us, and those who have not, who share the grief of the former, and are in fear for themselves. All men look upon us as their common foes, as wild beasts, as demons. Everywhere are there innumerable accusations, plots against us, envyings, all which are the acts of enemies. But justice, on the contrary, makes all men friends, all men sociable, all men well disposed towards us, by all men prayers are made in our behalf; our affairs are in perfect safety, there is no danger, there is no suspicion. But sleep

also fearlessly comes over us with perfect safety, no care is there, no lamenting.

How much better this sort of life is! And what? Is it best to envy, or to rejoice with one another? Let us search out all these things, and we shall find that virtue, like a truly kind mother, places us in safety, while vice is a treacherous thing, and full of danger. For hear the prophet, who says, The Lord is a stronghold of them that fear Him, and His covenant is to show them. Psalm 25:14, Septuagint He fears no one, who is not conscious to himself of any wickedness; on the contrary, he who lives in crime is never confident, but trembles at his domestics, and looks at them with suspicion. Why say, his domestics? He cannot bear the tribunal of his own conscience. Not only those who are without, but his inward thoughts affect him likewise, and allow him not to be in quiet. What then, says Paul? Ought we to live dependent on praise? He said not, look to praise, but do praiseworthy actions, yet not for the sake of praise.

Whatsoever things are true, for the things we have been speaking of are false. Whatsoever things are honorable. That which is honorable belongs to external virtue, that which is pure to the soul. Give no cause of stumbling, says he, nor handle of accusation. Because he had said, Whatsoever things are of good report, lest you should think that he means only those things which are so in the sight of men, he proceeds, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things -- do these things. He wills us ever to be in these things, to care for these things, to think on these things. For if we will be at peace with each other, God too will be with us, but if we raise up war, the God of peace will not be with us. For nothing is so hostile to the soul as vice. That is, peace and virtue place it in safety. Wherefore we must make a beginning on our part, and then we shall draw God toward us.

God is not a God of war and fighting. Make war and fighting to cease, both that which is against Him, and that which is against your neighbor. Be at peace with all men, consider with what character God saves you. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Matthew 5:9 Such always imitate the Son of God: do thou imitate Him too. Be at peace. The more your brother wars against you, by so much the greater will be your reward. For hear the prophet who says, With the haters of peace I was peaceful. Psalm 120:7, Septuagint This is virtue, this is above man's understanding, this makes us near God; nothing so much delights God as to remember no evil. This sets you free from your sins, this looses the charges against you: but if we are fighting and buffeting, we become far off from God: for enmities are produced by conflict, and from enmity springs remembrance of evil.

Cut out the root, and there will be no fruit. Thus shall we learn to despise the things of this life, for there is no conflict, none, in spiritual things, but whatever you see, either conflicts or envy, or whatever a man can mention, all these spring from the things of this life. Every conflict has its beginning either in covetousness, or envy, or vainglory. If therefore we are at peace, we shall learn to despise the things of the earth. Hath a man stolen our money? He has not injured us, only let him not steal our treasure which is above. Hath he hindered your glory? Yet not that which is from God, but that which is of no account. For this is no glory, but a mere name of glory, or rather a shame. Hath he stolen your honor? Rather not yours but his own. For as he who commits injustice does not so much inflict as receive injustice, thus too he who plots against his neighbor, first destroys himself.

For he who digs a pit for his neighbor, falls into it. Proverbs 26:27 Let us then not plot against others, lest we injure ourselves. When we supplant the reputation of others, let us consider that we injure ourselves, it is against ourselves we plot. For perchance with men we do him harm, if we have power, but we injure ourselves in the sight of God, by provoking Him against us. Let us not then harm ourselves. For as we injure ourselves when we injure our neighbors, so by benefiting them we benefit ourselves. If then your

enemy harm you, he has benefited you if you are wise, and so requite him not with the same things, but even do him good. But the blow, you say, remains severe. Consider then that thou dost not benefit, but punishest him, and benefitest yourself, and quickly you will come to do him good. What then? Shall we act from this motive? We ought not to act on this motive, but if your heart will not hear other reason, induce it, says he, even by this, and you will quickly persuade it to dismiss its enmity, and will for the future do good to your enemy as to a friend, and will obtain the good things which are to come, to which God grant that we may all attain in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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