

## Grace

### Essay 19 in the series “Ode to Joy”

We now come to the end of our reflections on Paul’s letter to the Philippians. He reminds the Philippians that “my God will meet all your needs” (4:19). Those of us who have lived for some time, especially if we have survived trouble and if we have suffered loss, know that this is true – that God has always been faithful to us. It may not look that way to you. It may not look that way to me the next time trouble comes. Sometimes I can be so feeble. But when we look back, we know that our God, my God, your God, meets all our needs.

Then of course Paul breaks into worship:

“My God will meet all your needs,  
according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.  
To our God and Father  
be glory for ever and ever.  
Amen.”

So be it! And then it’s just the final greetings, standard really. Except for one thing. He says in verses 21 and 22, “Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings. All the saints send you greetings,” and then adds, “especially those who belong to Caesar’s household.” In fact, because of Paul’s imprisonment and the 24/7 guard duty around him, it had become clear to many in Caesar’s household that Paul was in chains because of gospel, the great good news of who God is, and what God has done, and what God is doing, and what God will do.

So Paul ends his letter to the Philippian believers in the Roman colony of Philippi, who were being oppressed by those who worshipped Caesar and the gods of Rome, by saying Christian faith is breaking through even in the palace of Caesar! Don’t despair, he in effect says. This message wins out everywhere. Even in the very center of Roman power. And then he signs off beautifully, joyfully: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.”

Always grace.

Always joy.

With this Paul’s Ode to Joy ends. And it is an Ode to Joy. Paul comes back again and again to the theme of joy and shows us the way back to joy.

And so we end this series with:

### **A Responsive Reading.**

May your love abound. (1:9)

Rejoice.

In the bad times, keep your perspective.  
 What does it matter  
 if people sometimes do  
 thoughtless, hurtful things? (1:18)

Rejoice.

CHRIST is sufficient reason to live  
 and Christ is sufficient reason to die. (1:21ff.)

Rejoice.

Stand firm in one spirit;  
 look out for one another.  
 Find unity in your diversity. (1:27)

Rejoice.

Remember that you shine  
 like stars in the universe. (2:15)

Rejoice.

Stand up to the joy-stealers,  
 those who would take the great good news of God  
 and reduce it to law and tradition. (3:1-6)

Rejoice.

Know Christ Jesus your Lord.  
 Gain Christ and be found in that realm that is Christ.  
 Know Christ  
 and the power of his resurrection  
 and, yes, even the meaning that is found  
 in sharing in his sufferings. (3:7-11)

Rejoice.

But don't suppose  
 that you have already obtained all this!  
 There is so much more to learn.  
 There is so much more to take hold of.  
 BUT forget what is behind,  
 all you once treasured  
 – much of it is rubbish –  
 and strain forward.  
 Press on toward the goal,  
 the prize for which  
 God has called us heavenward  
 in Christ Jesus. (3:12-14)

Rejoice.

Learn to live with your differences.  
 Leave such matters to God.  
 Only live up  
 to what you've already attained. (3:15-16)

Rejoice.

Remember where your citizenship is.  
 In heaven.  
 It's a citizenship in which  
 you can always take pride. (3:20)

Rejoice.

Rejoice in the Lord always.  
 I will say it again: Rejoice.  
 Let your gentleness, your restraint,  
 be evident to all.  
 The Lord is near,  
 within you and all around.  
 Do not be anxious about anything.  
 Instead pray.  
 Ask God.  
 Be grateful;  
 you do have so much to be grateful for. (4:4-6)

Rejoice.

Whatever is true,  
 whatever is noble,  
 whatever is right,  
 whatever is pure,  
 whatever is lovely,  
 whatever is admirable  
 – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy –  
 think about such things. (4:8)

Rejoice.

Accentuate the positive.  
 Eliminate the negative.  
 You get a choice!  
 And that choice makes all the difference.

Rejoice.

Embrace what is best in your culture,  
 its founding stories,  
 its finest ideals,  
 its great literature,  
 its great art,  
 its great music,  
 its profound, caring and loving people.

Rejoice.

BUT hold all this up to the light of the gospel.  
 Whatever you have heard or thought,  
 the gospel outshines all else. (4:9)

Rejoice.

Remember  
 – as counter-intuitive as this may seem  
 in either Rome or America –  
 the one who being in very nature God  
 made himself nothing,

took the very nature of a servant,  
emptied himself,  
and died on a cross.

This is the one  
God exalts to the highest place.  
At his name every knee will bow  
and every tongue confess. (2:6-11)

Let this be your attitude.  
Empty yourself  
so that God can fill you,  
so that you can be filled  
to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Rejoice.

Now knowing this,  
you know the secret of being content  
in any and every situation.  
Now you can do everything  
through the one who gives you strength. (4:11-13)

Rejoice.

Your God will meet all your needs. (4:19)

Rejoice.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is with your spirit. (4:23)

Rejoice.

I will say it again: Rejoice!