

Meditation from The Rev Peter Johnson, October 2020

Read Philippians 1:3-11

There are so many problems besetting the world at the moment. How are we to cope? Well, when Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians he was in prison. Yes, he wasn't in lock down; he was locked up! And this, after being given a beating. And yet, throughout this letter, his overwhelming theme is summed up by this command; '**rejoice**'. What a wonderful spiritual insight he had. But how could **rejoice** come into this sort of situation? Much more to the point, are **we** able to look at all the things in **our** lives which perplex and vex us, and still turn to each other and say **rejoice**? Can **we** live with the inconvenience of Covid, and say **rejoice**? Are **we** able to experience all that assails the Church in general, and ourselves in particular, and still say **rejoice**?



Well, of course, Paul isn't telling us to rejoice at the sufferings we experience. What he's saying is that we **can** rejoice **despite** the difficulties that confront us. In fact, he's saying that we **should** rejoice. And, of course, he's telling us that we **can** do so because of the love that God has for us, and of being able to be sure of his presence with us even in our difficulties. And this really is a 'wow' experience.

But, to be able to rejoice in difficult times as we live our lives, we have to understand the workings of God's power amongst us, and there are times when this is sometimes not easy to do.

What we need to do is chase up God's own promise, so to speak. We have his promise that he will hear us when we ask in faith. Jesus sent out his disciples, and who else are we; he sent out his disciples into the difficulties that surrounded them and he continues to use us too. But, with all this to comfort us, somehow, if we're honest, it doesn't always seem easy, does it?

There are times, when we can wonder when Paul says that all our needs will be met. Well now, are they? Here's the rub. Yes, our every need is met, but not our every want. The way to follow is always there in front of us, but we can only see it when we stop thinking of our own paths.



So now, here we are. Are we to hold back as problems arise? Should we turn away because the path isn't as straight as we hoped? Should we let frustration, and worse still inertia, overcome us? Far from it. Remember how Paul spoke of his difficulties; **rejoice!** So, should we hold back - - of course not. It's not only we who know that many things are causing us concern in our lives - - God also knows. And He is totally interested in those worries which press upon us all from time to time. God relies on us to bring them before him; but then there's another step. From then on, we have to recognise that God, in his wisdom, and out of his love; that God will enable us to succeed in His mission despite those things which he realises, far better than we ever could, are able to bring devastation to us. Yes, in God we should indeed **rejoice**.



But there are ways in which we, as supplicants, can get things wrong, and, if you want to study them more closely, the place to which to turn is the fourth chapter of the letter of James. The reasons why we sometimes seem never to get an answer to our prayers are twofold.

There's no do it yourself kit in Christianity; and mercifully there's never any need for one. Often, we don't ask, despite the promises of God; promises explained time and time again throughout this letter of St. Paul. But not to come to God with our worries is an insult to him. It suggests that we either don't believe He cares, a blasphemy in itself; or it means that we consider we're far too insignificant to speak to him and ask his help. However, although this may sound suitably humble, in fact it belittles God's caring, for we are his children. We are members of his family, a family whom he loves and whom he yearns to bless. Yes, **rejoice**.

So, the watchword is simply this. The supply for all our needs is in Jesus. There we have it, in one very short sentence. The supply for all our needs is in Jesus. Jesus has already met all our problems and provided for them, and there's no turning back from this. Not ever.

Listen to how Paul describes this. 'For no matter how many promises God has made, they are yes in Christ.' In other words, all God's promises have been fulfilled in Christ. Promises for forgiveness, promises for healing, for blessing, for guidance, for the gift of the Holy Spirit, for hope, for assurance; all these are provided in Christ. Think of this whenever you worry.



Listen to Paul again, 'God did not spare his Son. Will he not also give us all things through him?' Let's face it, God gave us the greatest gift He could ever give, his own Son. Will he not also give us lesser gifts of caring for us in the problems, sometimes the trivialities, we worry about?

So, let's go back to the passage from Paul's letter to the Philippians with which I started, for it's really this verse which made me choose it. 'And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.'

Listen to the meaning here; that God isn't just dipping into a well of resources, with the supply getting less and less all the time. Rather it means that we become linked to the ever-flowing torrent of God's grace, which can never, ever run out. It tells us that God is encouraging us to believe and act on this; that there is no need you have that He is unwilling or unable to supply, magnificently, abundantly, and out of his glorious provision in Jesus Christ. And this is not just for some people. There's enough for the needs of all humanity, and even then, there will be an infinity left over. Well might Paul tell us to rejoice. God's loving care for us is infinite. And that is not just then, but now in **our** lives. **Rejoice.**

