

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **Again I will say, rejoice! Philippians 4:4**

I would like to begin this mornings message by reading you a portion, of the very first verse, of a very famous Christmas song entitled, “Deck the Halls.” It starts like this .....

**Deck the halls with boughs of holly, fa la la la la, la la la la / ‘Tis the season to be jolly, fa la la la la , la la la la.**

Do these words accurately describe the feelings of the vast majority of Americans during the Christmas season? Is it true that the Christmas season “Is the season to be jolly?” The answer unfortunately for many people during this time of year is a resounding, “No!!” In fact for many Americans this time of year, is a very difficult time; even a depressing time. Why?

Loneliness can make Christmas a difficult time for many people. Not everyone has a family that they can be with at Christmas. And being unable to be with family at Christmas, especially when it seems that everyone else has a family to go to, can be particularly painful. Certainly I would think you could understand how this might be difficult. But loneliness is not the only reason why someone might feel down at Christmas.

Bad memories can make Christmas a difficult time for many people. Christmas certainly is a great family occasion. But not all families have wonderful memories associated with Christmas. For them it could simply be a reminder of family fights, separations, poverty, or even abuse. Yes it is true that Christmas is a time to remember times past but unfortunately many times those memories are very painful. But loneliness, and bad memories are not the only reasons why someone might feel down at Christmas.

The recent loss of a loved one can make Christmas a difficult time for many people. Certainly a loss of a loved one is difficult at any time but at Christmas that loss tends to be accentuated since Christmas typically is the focal point of family celebrations.

Financial stresses can make Christmas a difficult time for many people. All too often people find themselves under pressure to spend, spend, spend at Christmas. From early Autumn we are bombarded with advertisements about all the things we should buy for that one magic day in December. The popular image is of a Christmas table groaning with food and drink and a huge pile of presents around a tree. But Christmas on that scale can be very expensive. It can be especially hard for parents, who can believe that they are failing if they can’t afford the latest fashion in toys or computer games. If we do give in to the pressure and the feelings of guilt which can surround Christmas and spend more than we can afford, the reckoning is always around the corner. The bills will come in, and will have to be paid. running up debts is bound to lead to anxiety, stress and even depression. And many people perhaps even some here this weekend might unnecessarily fall victim to these financial pressures.

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Another source of potential problems at Christmas for many people is not being away from family on Christmas, but being with family on Christmas. For some people a Christmas gathering with their family can be a form of torture. Being cooped up with relatives with whom you have nothing in common, being forced to play games that you don't enjoy, or to make conversation with people you may not even like, can be traumatic for many people at Christmas.

What am I trying to say? Don't assume that if you are one of those families who happen to feel like decking the halls with boughs of holly this Christmas season that everyone else in this church feels the same way that you do. Just because you are able this Christmas to sing the merry little phrase "Tis the season to be jolly" that everyone else in this fellowship feels the same way that you do. Christmas can be a very difficult time of year for many people and we as the followers of Christ need to do what we can to minister to the needs of those individuals.

And we also as the followers of Christ also need to understand that if we happen to be one of those individuals who do not feel so jolly at this time of year; either because of various circumstances that we have experienced in the past or are experiencing in the present there is a joy available to us as Christians that can easily take us through any difficulty that we might experience in this world even at Christmas.

And this weekend we will once again in our study of this great epistle have the opportunity to consider the truth of what I am now sharing. The new passage of scripture that we will begin to study this weekend is **Philippians 4:4-9**. Let me read this passage for you, **"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! (5) Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. (6) Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (7) And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (8) Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things. (9) The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you."**

Paul has now transitioned from his efforts to gain some help for Euodia and Synteché in resolving their conflict in **Philippians 4:2-3** to a series of final exhortations in **Philippians 4:4-9** that will set the stage for Paul concluding his letter to the Philippian church. Over the next several weeks we will be considering these concluding exhortations. The first exhortation that we will consider is the exhortation to rejoice.

Let me read for you once again **Philippians 4:4**, **"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"** Does this command sound familiar? It should. This is not a new command. He has given us this same command, to **"Rejoice in the Lord,"** earlier in the epistle in **Philippians 3:1**.

We need to be careful to not misunderstand what the Lord is calling us to do when he calls us to rejoice. He is not calling us to be happy. Happiness is an attitude of satisfaction or delight based on some present circumstance. Happiness is related to happenings.

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Happiness is related to “happenstance.” Happiness is related to “hap” which is a word that basically communicates chance. Happiness is that which you really can’t plan or program. Happiness may or may not happen.

But when we are talking about biblical joy we are talking about something that is not related to circumstances or chance at all. This is why we as Christians are able to rejoice a lot. How much is a lot? What does **Philippians 4:4** say, “**Always.**” If you are a Christian then no matter what is taking place around you or to you this weekend you should be even at this present moment, experiencing biblical joy.

Today you might not be feel like decking the halls with boughs of holly and you may not feel particularly jolly, but you can experience biblical joy. Biblical joy is a deep down confidence that all is well with our soul no matter what the circumstances might be. Horatio G. Spafford was a man who understood biblical joy well.

He was a man who knew the meaning of good times and bad times. He had a very successful law practice in Chicago, and numerous real estate holdings. After suffering the loss of his son, the Chicago fire of 1871 took his land holdings. Spafford planned a trip to Great Britain to join friends Moody and Sankey in one of their revival campaigns, in 1873. As he and his family prepared for the trip, he had to remain behind for some last minute business arrangements. So his wife and four daughters sailed on ahead aboard the S.S. ville du Havre. On November 22nd the ship was struck by another ship, and sank in twelve minutes. A few days later Spafford received a cable from his wife containing these words: “Saved ..... alone.” He soon boarded a ship to go meet his wife. While crossing the sea, near the place where the tragedy occurred, and his four daughters drowned, Spafford penned the words to the song “It is well with My soul.”

Let me read for you the very first verse of that song. “When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll - whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul.”

Was he happy about what had happened? No! He was grief stricken. What did he say, “When sorrows like sea billows roll?” Certainly the death of his four daughters was very much on his mind when he wrote those words. But even though he was grief stricken what accompanied his grief? A deep down confidence that all was well with his soul. Isn’t that what he wrote? “When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll - whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul.” This is biblical joy. Those who possess it will stand out from those who do not. Those who possess it will find themselves filled with hope rather than despair and hopelessness; just like Horatio Spafford.

Though as Christians we may or may not experience happiness which is related to circumstances, joy should be our constant companion. Joy should be our expectation. What did Paul say in **Philippians 4:4** “**Rejoice in the Lord always...**” And just in case we might miss the point he repeats the command, “.... **and again I say rejoice.**”

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The repetition of the command in **Philippians 4:4**, that we originally found in **Philippians 3:1**, “**to rejoice in the Lord**” gives us the opportunity this weekend to reexamine the theology of joy which we considered over 1 1/2 years ago when we began our study of this epistle. I would hope that this reexamination will help us to get a better understanding of joy and the part that it should play in our lives. I would hope that this reexamination will hopefully make it possible for all of us this weekend to leave here joyful. What do we learn about joy from the scriptures?

Biblical joy is a gift from God (Psalms 4:7-8; Psalms 16:11). Listen to **Psalms 4:7-8** “**Thou hast put gladness in my heart, More than when grain and new wine abound. (8) In peace I will both lie down and sleep, For Thou alone, O Lord, dost make me to dwell in safety.**” The psalmist was not looking to grain and new wine to put gladness in his heart or in other words, he was not looking to circumstances to put gladness in his heart but rather he was looking to the Lord. The psalmist knew if we was going to enjoy a deep down confidence that everything was okay regardless of the circumstances or in other words if he was going to experience biblical joy that it would come only from God. And we need to know this as well.

If you are here this weekend and you would like to be joyful no matter what is happening around you, then you must realize that this can only be experienced as a gift from God. The gifts that we receive this Christmas will not meet the deepest longings of our hearts. They may meet a need for the moment but not for a lifetime but the gift of joy that the Lord can give us can. Listen to **Psalms 16:11**, “**In Thy presence is fullness of joy; in Thy right hand there are pleasures forever more.**” Those who have received joy as a gift from God can be fully satisfied, no matter what.

But how do we receive this gift from God? We receive this gift from God as we would receive any other gift. It is received by faith.

Biblical joy is a gift from God to all those who believe (John 15:11). Listen to the words of Jesus to His disciples in **John 15:11**, “**These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.**” The joy that we receive from God as a gift can only be received when we positively respond to the message of Christ. How did He begin the verse? “**These things I have spoken to you.**” What things had Christ spoken to them? He had spoken to them about the importance of having a personal relationship with Him. He had spoken to them about having such an intimate relationship with Him they could be described as being “in Him” and He could be described as being in them.

And what would be the benefit of having an intimate relationship with Christ? His joy would be in them. Let us go back to the verse, “**These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you .....**” And what was the joy of Christ? Remember **Hebrews 12:2** what did it say? “**.... who for the joy set before Him endured the cross .....**” Christ had a confident expectation that no matter what happened to Him or around Him that everything would be okay. That even though He would die as our sacrificial lamb that He would be victorious over death and the grave and that He would be exalted to the right hand of the throne of God.

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Because we have believed in Christ and because we have entered into an intimate relationship with Him this very same joy, this confident expectation that all is well no matter what we might pass through no matter how severe that suffering might be is now in us. Again what did Christ say, **“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you.....”**.

If you are here this weekend and you know that you have entered into a personal relationship with Christ and that He is “in you” and that you are “in Him” then you can also be assured that His joy is in you as well.

If you are here this weekend and you are not confident that you have a personal relationship with Christ and therefore are not confident that His joy is in you I would encourage you at this moment in time, if you desire to be set free from your sins, that you would simply exercise faith in the gospel of Christ by transferring your trust from your own good works to Jesus Christ alone for your salvation. If you do this you will have the ability to experience Christ’s joy because Christ’s joy will actually be in you. Christ’s confidence that everything would work out for good no matter how severe the trials will actually be in you.

Horatio Spafford understood the close connection between his ability to experience biblical joy in the midst of tragedy and his personal faith in Christ. Look at how he links verse one of the song “it is well with my soul” to verse two of the same song.

“When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll - whatever my lot, thou hast thought me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul.” But then what does he say in the second verse? “My sin - O the joy of this glorious thought, my sin, not in part but the whole, is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more: praise the Lord, praise the Lord O My Soul” Horatio Spafford would never have written verse one if it weren’t for the truths contained in verse two. If he would not have entered into a personal relationship with Christ he never would have the resource experience what he did.

But you might be saying, “I know that I have a personal relationship with Christ but I do not feel as if I have His joy.” This leads us to consider the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Biblical joy is produced by the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). Listen to the words of **Romans 14:17** **“For the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”** How does the God unleash the joy that is ours in Christ? He unleashes the joy that is ours in Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is reinforced for us in **Galatians 5:22** which says, **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy ... etc. etc.”**

The problem with true believers not experiencing biblical joy in their everyday lives is not because they have not received Christ or have not received his joy. They have. But this joy still needs to be released or produced through the Holy Spirit. He is the One that Jesus has sent into this world and into our lives so that we can enjoy everything that Christ has provided for us in Himself on a daily basis. But the problem that we sometimes have is that, because of our sinful choices, we end up grieving or quenching the Spirit which is alluded to in **1 Thessalonians 5:19**. And this leads us to another important teaching concerning biblical joy.

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Biblical joy is a gift from God to all those who believe produced in them by the H.S. as they receive and obey God's word (Jeremiah 15:16). Listen to **Jeremiah 15:16** **“Thy words were found and I ate them, and Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; For I have been called by Thy name, O Lord God of host.”** Jeremiah received the word into his life. He is not talking about a superficial involvement with the word but a deep life changing involvement.

Let me ask you a question how important do you think that the word of God was to Horatio Spafford? Do you think that he considered the Scripture only periodically and superficially? Certainly I never had the opportunity to meet him but one thing I can tell you, God's word was important to him. And I believe that **Jeremiah 15:16** could very well have been his testimony. And it is because of his desire to receive and obey God's word that the Holy Spirit was able to release the joy of Christ even in the midst of such a terrible human tragedy.

If we are going to experience the fruit of the spirit such as joy then we cannot neglect or disobey God's word. We must long for the pure milk of the word. We must be desiring to build it into our lives. Not just some of it. But all of it. If we in any way choose to embrace or obey one truth while rejecting or disobeying another truth we will quench the Spirit of God and He will be unable to release the joy of Christ in the Holy Spirit.

Let me warn you this weekend. If the word of God is not the joy and delight of your heart. If you are not quick to receive it and obey it. There will be no way that you will ever experience biblical joy consistently in your life. Rather than singing the words written by Horatio Spafford you will be singing words such as “When sorrows like sea billows roll; whatever my pain, I have chosen to say, woe is me, O My soul.” Rather than experiencing the joy of Christ you wallow in the depths of personal despair and hopelessness. What a miserable and wretched life. What a totally disappointing response to difficult times for a professing believer. This leads us to another important teaching concerning biblical joy.

Biblical joy will thrive in the midst of trials (1 Thess. 1:6; James 1:2). Listen to **1 Thessalonians 1:6**, **“You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit.”** The trials that the Thessalonians experienced as a result of their faith did not in any way dampen their joy. The trials that the Thessalonians experienced as a result of their faith did not in any way dampen their sense of personal well being. In fact it appears from Paul's words that their joy was thriving.

Why? Biblical joy will thrive in the midst of trials because the presence of it reassures the child of God a future glory. This leads us to another important teaching concerning biblical joy.

Biblical joy will focus on future glory (1 Peter 1:6-8). Listen to the words **1 Peter 1:6-8**, **“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, (7) that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”** Those who are suffering but who at the same time are able to experience biblical joy should look upon it as a mark of true genuine faith and as a precursor to future glory.

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And again that is exactly what we see in the words that were written by Horatio Spafford but this time we will go to the third verse, “And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight, the clouds be rolled back as a scroll: the trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend, even so. It is well with my soul.”

### CONCLUSION

You may not this Christmas season be feeling like decking the halls with boughs of holly but if you are a disciple of Christ you can in spite of whatever circumstances you are in experience biblical joy. What is biblical joy? Biblical joy is the deep down confidence that all is well with our soul no matter what the circumstances might be. And what do we learn from the Scriptures about biblical joy?

It is a gift from God to all those who believe produced in them by the Holy Spirit as they receive and obey God’s word, which will thrive in the midst of trials, while focusing on future glory.

Not only can we experience biblical joy but we are expected to experience biblical joy even at Christmas if you are in fact a disciple of Christ. Paul said, **“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!”**