

April 20, 2014 by Steve Brandon



Rejoicing in the Resurrection

Philippians 4:4

1. Matthew 28 - Rejoicing in the Unexpected

2. Luke 24 - Rejoicing in the Realization

3. Acts 13 - Rejoicing in Believing

4. 1 Peter 1 - Rejoicing in Salvation

Since September, last fall, we have been working our way through the book of Philippians. In God's providence, during the Christmas season, we were in chapter 2, which speaks about the incarnation of Jesus. This gave us much reason to simply continue on in Philippians during Christmas, as the text brought us to think of the coming of Christ to the earth.

And this Resurrection morning, again, we are in a text that lends itself nicely to the resurrection. So, I see no reason to deviate from our regular exposition of Philippians. I invite you to open in your Bibles to Philippians, chapter 4. We are simply going to look at one verse today. It is verse 4. It simply reads,

Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"

This is one of those verses in the Scripture that is quite exhaustive in their application. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 comes to mind, "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks." It matters not what the circumstances are in your life. It matters not whether things are going well for you or if things are not going well. The call of God upon your life is to be a thankful, prayerful, and joyful person.

Now, there are times when this is easy. When you are experiencing the blessing of God in your life, and things are going your way, and the Lord is shining His goodness upon you, then it is easy. There are other times when this is difficult. Particularly, it is difficult when the circumstances of life have turned against you; when things are hard and you are facing some difficult trial in your life. Even then, you are called to rejoice in the Lord (Philippians 4:4). James says this, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials" (James 1:2). In other words, even when the trials come, God calls us to be joyful.

Now, it's not that we are joyful of the trial itself. Rather, we are joyful in what we know the trial will produce. Let me finish the thought of James, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4). When the trials come, you can have joy not because of the trials themselves, but because of what you know that the trials will produce! In this way, we can "rejoice in the Lord always," even when trials come.

Now, this isn't to say that you should simply put a fake smile upon your face and travel around and carry about as if all is fine and well, when truly all isn't fine and well. When facing loss in your life, there is a time for sorrow and sadness and tears and pain. When a loved one dies or is severely injured. When a loved one is diagnosed with cancer (or some other life-threatening disease). When your house burns down or when your children go astray or when your hopes are dashed. There is an appropriate place for weeping in the Christian life. As Ecclesiastes 3 says, "There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven. ... A time to weep and a time to laugh; A time to mourn and a time to dance" (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4).

But, through it all, as believers in Christ, we are called to rejoice in the Lord. You say, how can this be? If there is a time to weep, how can we be rejoicing? If there is a time to mourn, how can we be rejoicing? In 2 Corinthians 6:10, Paul gives us a short, little phrase to help us out. After listing some of the incredible hardships that he faced in his ministry, he said, that we was, "sorrowful yet always rejoicing" (2 Corinthians 6:10). In other words, he was facing the real emotions that one goes through in times of hardship. But, underlying it all was a contented rejoicing in the Lord.

Now, this morning, our focus isn't on rejoicing in the bad times, although the Bible has a lot to say about this. And the topic of rejoicing in the bad times does fall under the scope of Philippians 4:4. But that's for another day. This morning, we are going to focus upon one thing. We are going to focus upon rejoicing in the resurrection. Indeed, this is the title of my message this morning, "Rejoicing in the Resurrection."

I simply searched through the Bible for instances in which the resurrection and joy intersected. There are many. I have chosen some passages where joy and resurrection occur in the same passage. So, rather than staying right here in Philippians 4 (as is our custom), we are going to flip to a handful of Scriptures and see how we can rejoice in the resurrection. So, turn in your Bibles to Matthew 28 for my first point.

1. Matthew 28 - Rejoicing in the Unexpected

This is the account of the women coming to the tomb and finding it empty.

Matthew 28:1-8

Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you." And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples.

Right there in verse 8 you can see joy in these women, "And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples." Their joy wasn't alone. It came "with fear" as well. You can understand these emotions when you understand what was taking place at that moment.

These women were with the few that buried Jesus.

Matthew 27:59-61

And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away. And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the grave.

They saw where Jesus was buried. They saw the stone rolled in front of the tomb. They spent the Sabbath at home. And then, first thing in the morning, as soon as it began to dawn, when the birds were chirping, they came to the tomb.

Mark tells us that they came to anoint the body of Jesus with spices, which was the typical practice in those days. They put the body in the tomb and let it decay for a year, after which, they would return and gather the bones and bury them in the ground. Mark also tells us that their discussion on the way to the tomb was all about the big stone that was rolled in front of the tomb. They didn't know how they would move it so that they could anoint the body of Jesus (Mark 16:3).

But, when they came to the tomb, they encountered the unexpected. They were expecting the stone in front of the tomb. And they were expecting to see Jesus' body laid in the tomb, as they were going to anoint his body with spices. But, that's not what they saw. Instead, they saw an empty tomb. And they saw no body. And, they heard a message from an angel, telling them that Jesus had risen from the dead, ...

Matthew 28:5-7

The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you."

It's only right that they went away from the tomb "with fear and great joy." We can understand the fear. They had just encountered an angel! They were in a fog, because they didn't quite experience what they had expected. We can understand the joy. It is like when some great blessing happens which you are totally not expecting.

Examples of this in our lives are too numerous to count. You are given the bonus at work that you weren't expecting. You win that scholarship that you thought you had no chance of getting. You get that Christmas present from your parents that you never thought possible. I'm sure that you have had some sort of experience like this to which you can relate to some similar experience in your life.

How about this story. Several months ago, Joel at the children's home in India had his automobile stolen. We had some money in our missions fund that might meet this need. So, I called up Bob (a missionary we have supported as a church) and asked him if would be appropriate for us, as a church, to replace the automobile for him. He said, "Absolutely. Especially as rainy season is approaching. An automobile would be very much appreciated."

And so, just this past week, he returned to India to continue his work in Nepal and India. While at the children's home in India, he took a motorcycle ride to some car dealers to "look" at cars. Joel had no idea about the unexpected donation, though he and Tara had prayed for it fervently. He was shocked when he and Bob found the right car and Bob said, "Let's buy it!"

Can you imagine the shock and joy that Joel experienced when he was to receive a replacement car? Joel will soon be getting a new 2014, 9-passenger Mahendra Xylo SUV! Bob writes, "I think he is happy:-) When Tara and the kids heard the news, they praised God as they had been praying for this since their other car was stolen."

This is the joy that we ought to feel with the resurrection. Sadly, we have come to expect it, because we know that Easter comes every spring! We know that it's coming six weeks after Ash Wednesday! And it will happen again next year! But, put yourself in the shoes of these women. Yes, Jesus had told them that he would rise again, but they didn't understand. And they didn't believe. But, now, it all came true. And they were joyful and fearful at the same time. We, too, should be like the women of Matthew 28, "Rejoicing in the Unexpected!"

Well, let's look at another passage where joy and the resurrection intersect, Luke 24. I'm calling this, ...

2. Luke 24 - Rejoicing in the Realization

I call it this because it is here that the resurrection begins to sink in for the disciples. They begin to realize that He is really alive! Since Phil read the entire chapter for us this morning, there's no need for us to work through it again. I trust that you remember how the chapter unfolds. The beginning of the chapter tells of the account that we just looked at with the women arriving at the empty tomb. The heart of the chapter tells the story of Jesus appearing to the two disciples travelling on the road to Emmaus. But, I want to focus upon the last part of this narrative, beginning in verse 36. This is where we see Luke mentioning the joy that the disciples experienced.

Luke 24:36-43

While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be to you." But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; and He took it and ate it before them.

Do you see how the disciples haven't fully processed the resurrection yet? Verse 36 tells us that Jesus was in their midst, speaking with them. But, verse 37 tells us that the disciples were "startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit." See, they hadn't fully comprehended the resurrection. They hadn't fully understood that Jesus had risen from the dead.

In verses 38 and 39, we see Jesus putting forth arguments that He was really alive!

Luke 24:38-39

And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

And in verse 41, we see Jesus asking His disciples if they have any food. It's almost as if He was trying anything in His power to convince them that He was indeed risen from the dead. "You can see Me. You can hear Me. You can touch me. What other senses do you want? Do you want to smell me? How about some fish, ... that will make me smell." This is a very earthly scene of Jesus and His disciples. And in verse 41, we see the joy of the disciples, ...

Luke 24:41

While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"

It's like they were in a dream. I know that this happens to me every time I travel to Nepal or India. I'm halfway around the world. I've seen pictures of children and leaders in the church. But now, these pictures have come to life, as these children are talking and laughing and playing with each other. It is familiar, but something is different. It's like I'm in a different world. It's a very surreal and joyous experience. It really is. That's what happened to Israel when they returned home after the Babylonian captivity.

Psalm 126:1-3

When the Lord brought back the captive ones of Zion,
We were like those who dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter
And our tongue with joyful shouting;
Then they said among the nations,
"The Lord has done great things for them."
The Lord has done great things for us;
We are glad.

That's what the disciples were experiencing. They were experiencing a sort of dream world. They had seen Jesus die upon the cross. And now, He's sitting right there with them, talking with them and eating His fish. It was like too much to comprehend.

Luke 24:41

... they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement,

Their joy and amazement was swirling within them. Do you feel like that? Do you feel like the resurrection is difficult to comprehend? Join the club. It is difficult to understand. And any glimpse that you get of the resurrection fills your heart with joy. But, the disciples finally do get it. Look at verse 50, ...

Luke 24:50-53

And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they, after worshipping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising God.

These words describe the ascension of Christ, when Jesus was taken up into heaven. By the time the disciples witnessed this, it had been 40 days after His resurrection. Jesus had spent much time with them teaching them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). And though Jesus had left them for a final time, they were rejoicing, because they knew that it was all true. Jesus had died upon the cross for our sins. And He was raised from the dead to show that everything that He ever spoke was true.

And the disciples went from that place with great joy and "turned the world upside down" with their preaching (Acts 17:6). And if we would but grasp the resurrection, we too would go forth from this place with great joy and "turn the world upside down."

Have you come to the point where you have fully realized the resurrection of Jesus? See, this isn't some esoteric point of philosophy. No, this is a matter of believing in history. It's a matter of believing the testimony of the apostles. The disciples wouldn't go out and preach the resurrection unless they were firmly convinced that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. This was a fact to which they were eyewitnesses!

Well, let's see them preach in my next point. We have seen the women 1. Matthew 28:8 - Rejoicing in the Unexpected. We saw the apostles 2. Luke 24 - Rejoicing in the Realization. Next we move on to Acts 13. I'm calling this one, ...

3. Acts 13 - Rejoicing in Believing

This is one of my favorite stories in all of the Bible. It's the story of Paul coming to Pisidian Antioch on his first missionary journey. Pisidian Antioch is in the heart of modern day Turkey. Let's pick up the story in verse 14, ...

Acts 13:14-16

But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it." Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, ...

Picture the scene. Those in Pisidian Antioch were used to gathering on the Sabbath. On this particular Saturday, some visitors came into the synagogue. As was the custom in those days, they were invited to say a few words. And so, Paul stands up and preaches.

Now, we don't have time this morning to read through the entire sermon. Let me give you the summary version. Paul told those in the synagogue that God has been active in the history of Israel. Choosing the fathers (verse 17). Giving them judges (verse 20). Giving them kings (Verses 21, 22). Paul went on to confirm that that God had continued his activity in their day. God has given them Jesus, the Messiah. The Romans put Him to death. But, God raised Him from the dead.

I do want to read the second half of Paul's message, as it is all about Jesus being raised from the dead. So, I want to begin in verse 26, and I want for you to listen to the number of times that Paul mentions Jesus raising from the dead.

Acts 13:26-41

"Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him. And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead; and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'You are My Son; today I have begotten You.' As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.' Therefore He also says in another Psalm, 'You will not allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.' For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay; but He whom God raised did not undergo decay. Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses. Therefore take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you:

'Behold, you scoffers, and marvel, and perish;
For I am accomplishing a work in your days,
A work which you will never believe,
though someone should describe it to you.'"

Four times in these verses, Paul mentions the resurrection of Jesus. [\[1\]](#) Note how Paul calls this, "the message of this salvation" (verse 26). This is the gospel. Paul writes at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 15, "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, ..." (1 Corinthians 15:1). He continues, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."

And this is what we find Paul preaching in Acts 13 to Pisidian Antioch. Jesus lived a worthy life. Jesus died an unjust death. Jesus was placed in a tomb. Jesus rose from the dead.

The synagogue was stirred with this message. In verse 42 we see that they were begging Paul to come back the next Sabbath and speak of

these same things again. Surely throughout the week, people were talking about Paul's message in the synagogue about a dead man who has come to life! Surely, there was some discussion about Psalm 16, to which Paul referred in his message. Indeed, Paul came back into the synagogue the next week to much excitement and anticipation. Verse 44 picks up the story, ...

Acts 13:44-47

The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us,

'I have placed You as a light for the Gentiles,
That You may bring salvation to the end of the earth.'"

And now comes the joy.

Acts 13:48

When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

They were spontaneously rejoicing! Now, catch who it was that believed! It was the Gentiles, who the Jews despised. In fact, when they came upon the synagogue, the Jews hated it and began to resist Paul and the message he preached. This tells us that they weren't welcome in the synagogue. This tells us that these people probably knew only a little about the gospel.

And that may be you today. You may be visiting with us today, knowing very little about the Bible or about the gospel or about the resurrection. Please know this -- we are not like the Jews who want no part of you. No, we are like Paul, who said, "the message of this salvation" (verse 26) has come to you. We call you to believe. In verse 48, we see these Gentiles who heard that the message was for them, "rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord." Jesus was raised from the dead. Believe in Him and you too can be saved -- this very morning. You, too, can have your sins washed away. You, too, can know the joys of God.

Right there in verse 48, we see that "as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed" -- right then and there. They entered the kingdom by believing in Jesus. As a result, verse 49, ...

Acts 13:49

And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region.

Because, when you come to believe this great message, you can't help but to talk about it with others. Just think of something that gives you joy and pleasure. Your sports events on television. Your woodworking hobby you do on the weekends. Your crafts that you do with other women. The books that you are reading. The places you like to go. The activities that your children are involved in. The animals that you keep in your house. The addition you are building onto your house. The big project at work. The upcoming wedding. You can't help but to speak about these things with others.

So also, when you believe in Christ, he will fill your heart with such joy that you can't help but to speak with others about it. There is great joy in believing in the resurrection. Do you have the joy? Are you talking about it?

Well, let's move on to my last point this morning, ...

4. 1 Peter 1 - Rejoicing in Salvation

For this point, I want for us to turn to 1 Peter, chapter 1. This is a letter written by the apostle Peter to the churches that were scattered across Asia Minor. I want to read verses 3-6.

1 Peter 1:3-6

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,

You see the resurrection there in verse 3. You see the joy in verse 6. First of all, the resurrection. Peter praised God in verse 3 for the salvation that He has brought to us. By God's "great mercy," he has "caused us to be born again" -- that is, He has changed us. We have been "born again." We have been "born from above." Our heart's desires are no longer earthly, but heavenly. He has this "living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

When Christ was raised from the dead, He was simply the "first fruits" of what is to come. He was raised first. We can expect to follow Him. He was raised into the joys of heaven. We too can anticipate a similar inheritance. That's what verse 4 is all about.

1 Peter 1:4

to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

This is where, one day, all who believe in Christ will join with Him in this place that never breaks. Rust never comes. The moth never eats. It is a holy place. All who are there have been sanctified through the blood of Jesus. We won't experience conflicts. There will be no crime. The glory of the place will never fade. After 10,000 years, everything will be as bright and brilliant and beautiful as it was the day we arrived! And this is guaranteed, as we continue to believe and trust in Him.

Peter 1:5

who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

And this salvation is so great that we rejoice in it (verse 6).

1 Peter 1:6

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,

Those to whom Peter wrote were in a much more difficult place than we are. They had believed in Jesus. And now, they were suffering for it. Remember, Christians in the first century had a difficult time as they faced opposition from the Jews and from the Romans. They were ridiculed. They were mocked. Some even had their property confiscated. But, the resurrection and the promise of our eternal inheritance is enough to give us joy that overcomes these things.

Too often people see God as a genie in a lamp. You rub this lamp and the genie appears and grants your wish. You see this all the time with tragedy. People who don't give a lick about God will suddenly cry out to Him when in distress, hoping that somehow God will appear to solve their problem. In a less-draconic way you also see it in people who have some big problems in their lives. Looking for answers, they read their Bibles in the hope of finding some key that will solve their problems. In some measure, they are hoping that God will somehow appear and grant their wish for a better life. In this way they are actually using God for their own ends.

But, the salvation that God has brought about in Christ through the resurrection from the dead is much bigger than this. The hope that we have in Him is so grand that we can endure a few minor inconveniences along the way.

John Newton, former slave trader and pastor in England during the 1700's once wrote, "Suppose a man was going to New York to take possession of a large estate, and his [carriage] should break down a mile before he got to the city, which obliged him to walk the rest of the way; what a fool we should think him, if we saw him wringing his hands, and blubbering out all the remaining mile, 'My [carriage] is broken! My [carriage] is broken!'" [2]

We understand clearly why such a man would be thought to be foolish. To cry about a broken carriage when you are within a day of inheriting a large estate worth hundreds of times more than the chariot appears to us to be absolutely ridiculous. Instead, he should be rejoicing on his way to New York, looking forward to the inheritance that awaits him.

For those of us who are in Christ we have an inheritance awaiting us in heaven which is far greater and far more valuable and far more lovely than any estate the richest among us will ever inherit. Yet we can easily grumble and complain and "blubber" at the trials and difficulties we face in this life on our way to our inheritance.

Instead, our hearts ought to be lifted up with joy at what the resurrection has accomplished for our eternal salvation. Are you rejoicing in your salvation that has come through the resurrection?

Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on April 20, 2014 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Chapter 13, verses 30, 32, 34, and 37.

[2] Richard Cecil, Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton, p. 108, as quoted by John Piper at http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Biographies/1485_John_Newton_The_Tough_Roots_of_His_Habitual_Tenderness/