

The Upward Look

Philippians 4:4-13

In the New King James, Philippians 4:4 reads, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, Rejoice!"

In the Message the reading is, "Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, revel in Him!"

We used to sing a song on the buses as we went to pick up the children and bring them to church during our college days. It was called, *Get the New Look from the Old Book*. As closely as I can remember, the words went like this...

Get the new look, from the Old Book
Get the new look from the Bible
Get the new look, from the old Book
Get the new look from God's Word

Get the inward look, the outward look, the upward look
from the old, old Book.
Get the New look from the old book
Get the new look from God's Word

Paul's word to us in Philippians, His call to us to Rejoice in the Lord, is an appeal to us to choose the upward look and to have the positive outlook, the freshness of a high and holy perspective, a frame of reference for all of our thinking and attitudes that begins with God and that proceeds from Him to encompass all that we experience of life.

If this sounds like a tall order, more that any ordinary Christian should be expected to achieve, consider that Paul, a very human Christian, was going through many distressing difficulties as He wrote to the Philippians. For one thing, Paul was in jail in Rome at the time he wrote this letter. Some were taking

advantage of his absence in order to make him appear inferior to themselves and less committed to serving the Lord. After all Paul had let himself get arrested and now he was in all this trouble... If this were not enough, Paul knew that he might be executed. He preached the Lordship of Jesus Christ rather than the Lordship of the Caesar. He gave serious thought to either outcome, that is of release from prison and further ministry or execution into the arms of Jesus. "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Whatever the outcome of his present circumstance, Paul knew that his ability to have a continuing ministry among his beloved Philippians was very limited. He might never see them again or if he did, his influence and effectiveness would be too little, too late. So, he sent them two of his most reliable partners, Timothy and Epaphroditus. But how would his beloved church fare without him?

Most closely connected to Paul's call to look upward in verse 4 of chapter 4 is the trouble in the Philippian church which was taking place between the two women, Euodia and Syntyche. Philip 4:1-3 in The Message reads, "My dear, dear friends! I love you so much. I do want the very best for you. You make me feel such joy, fill me with such pride. Don't waver. Stay on track, steady in God. I urge Euodia and Syntyche to iron out their differences and make up. God doesn't want His children holding grudges. And Oh, yes, Syzygus, since you're right there to help them work things out, do your best with them. These women worked for the Message hand in hand with Clement and me, and with the other veterans-worked as hard as any of us. Remember, their names are also in the Book of Life." The schism between the two women threatened the unity of the church. Paul knew that people, with their old loyalties, could easily take sides based on friendship, or blood relations, or an opinion about who was to blame. Such a division could easily harm many, tear the church apart, and greatly hinder future ministry. So, Paul named the problem for what it was and appealed to a mature member to intervene... but, the best answer for the situation and an answer for just about any other situation is to Get a new look from the old book. Get the upward look from God's Word.

In the New King James, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice!"

In the Message, "Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, revel in Him!"

When you take the upward look, you begin your thinking with God. You then have a firm foundation upon which to build your day and your life for He never changes. Lots of things do change. The weather changes. Your bank account changes. Your health changes. Your relationships are inevitably full of ups and downs but Jesus is always the same. Hebrews puts it this way, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever."

Jesus never changes and He loves you with a fervent and constant love. His love is not to be measured by the thermometer of our daily circumstances. Contemplating Christ's love is not like picking daisies, "He loves me, He loves me not." No, His love was demonstrated long ago on the cross. His sacrifice there declares through the ages that He loves you. He loved you then. He's loved you ever since. He loves you now.

So the upward look, looking at God first every day and celebrating Him, will bring a quickness to your step, a confidence to your spirit. This comes from the certainty of purpose and the enthusiasm of significance that comes from knowing that we were important enough to God, to the Creator of the universe, for Him to give His only begotten Son for our salvation.

I tend to walk slowly. Even when I take a walk for exercise I have a difficult time sustaining a rapid pace. Rita can out-walk me any day of the week. Lizzy can out-walk either one of us. But something strange can occasionally take place. If we go to a Dodger game and you know, the Giants are in town, we park the car, get all our things together and start walking toward the stadium... I find myself looking over my shoulder and waving to the girls, Come on, come on, let's go!

The upward look will have this affect. It will animate and energize.

When you look up, you remember who is in charge. You are drawn to the "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven..." The presence you enter when you "Rejoice in the Lord" assures that, in fact, "everything is going to turn out all right, just you wait and see. Everything is going to turn out all right, God is watching over me."

In Hebrews again there is this word, "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have, for He Himself has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" And the answer to all our fears after we engage in the upward look is that there is nothing that can happen in the coming day that can in any way alter the validity of the upward look that "Rejoices in the Lord," or that "Celebrates God all day and every day... and I mean revels in Him."

The upward look is like a roll call. You've seen the cop shows on TV. The police sergeant conducts the roll call and gives the troops their marching orders for the day. Paul called for us to look up to rejoice in the Lord, to Celebrate God and what comes next? Marching orders. In the New King James, "Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand."

In the Message, "Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you're on their side, working with them and not against them. Help them to see that the Master is about to arrive. He could show up any minute!"

Rejoice in the Lord, be conscious of God and His will for this day. Engage your world with the heart and goodwill of God. You have experienced just how deeply God loves you but most of the people you encounter will not be consciously aware of this at all. This is the fact that changes everything. God, the Creator of the universe knows you and loves you and sent His Son to die for you and every day He looks down upon you and seeks by His Spirit to call you to Himself and to engage with you in a relationship of love and rich fellowship.

The upward look changes everything. What seemed important isn't. That which you were not even thinking about is suddenly critical. The coming of the kingdom and will of God on earth, this is the new focus. So, let everyone know that you're on their side. You're going to do all you can so that they can see the Master. He's about to arrive. He could show up at any minute. Look up! Rejoice in the Lord! Celebrate God! Revel in Him!