

Rejoice in the Lord

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 Gotthold Beck

主にあつて喜べ
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 ゴットホルド・ベック

1 Thessalonians

5:16 Always be joyful.

5:17 Continually be prayerful.

5:18 In everything be thankful, because this is
 God's will for you in the Messiah Jesus.

[International Standard Version]

These verses we just read are well known to many people. Although they seem to be simple things to do, they are not so easy to put into practice. Many commandments in the Bible are written not to be followed, but to be broken.

The Lord tells us many things to do. But he understands that we can't obey them all no matter how hard we try. If all people can live as they are supposed to, we don't need Jesus. So, although nobody wants to be troubled and it is very hard and unpleasant to be anguished, it is necessary for us.

"Always be joyful. Continually be prayerful. In everything be thankful." These are not merely his suggestions but his direct commands. I guess these words are written for the happiness of humans. Needless to say, we did not gather here today to understand the many teachings and strive to be obedient. When we get together as we always do, the important task is to introduce Jesus who knows everything and who can do anything.

If you look away from Jesus, your life will be messed up. Contrarily, you can be hopeful when you think of Jesus. One of his names is the "God of Hope." As long as the God of Hope is alive and with us, we will be just fine and have nothing to worry about. If we can all say so, we will be blessed.

That is to say, because Jesus is almighty, we decided to rely on the Lord. In fact, life without Jesus is unpleasant, pointless and meaningless. Because Jesus is the only one who provides us with the real hope—an eternal life.

It is because Jesus is the only one who has the strength to give us true satisfaction and solve all problems. In this sense, this meeting today can be called the gathering of joy. Because most of the people

gathered can confess that they were brought here by Jesus.

Jesus is incomparable to anyone. So this gathering today is a sort of celebration to admire the sincerity of Jesus. Jesus never forsakes us. Jesus, who has promised, "I will never leave you or abandon you", is so sincere.

This is why we can renew our belief in his promise and fully entrust everything to him. Needless to say, we all pursue happiness in our life. We all want to be happy, because otherwise, our life will be so unpleasant and meaningless.

It is written that "this is God's will for you in the Messiah Jesus." What is the Lord's will for us? Needless to say, it is not to belong to some Christian organization, nor to believe in any specific teachings, nor to rely on our own knowledge or strength to become good human beings. Demands or requests of the Lord God can be summarized into the three points we just read.

Firstly, he wants us to always be joyful. It is not sometimes. It is not every other day. But always. In the Old Testament, the importance of rejoicing is mentioned 358 times. In addition, the importance, necessity and possibility of being joyful is mentioned 133 times in the New Testament and 491 in both Testaments combined. Of course, the most important phrase in here is "in the Messiah Jesus".

That is to say, the secret to obtain this joy that nobody can deprive us of lies in Jesus. By knowing Jesus and having a vibrant fellowship with Jesus, all kinds of flawed human thoughts, including solitude, arrogance, egotism and self-seeking, innocuous self-pity, desperation and distress will disappear.

On the other hand, it gives us true joy, peace and satisfaction. Jesus came down to this world to give us true salvation which is the forgiveness of our sins. He paid the price for salvation and abandoned his own life for us. To know Jesus through experience is, after all, to obtain eternal life.

In the fellowship with Jesus, we can find the true joy and source of constant delight. It is because Jesus himself is the fountain of life, hope, joy and peace. Jesus changes all sorrow to joy. Jesus changes the burden of your job to joy. Through Jesus, the weary are given new strength. Through Jesus, the emptiness of all human effort and frustration are changed to perfect peace and a sense of reassurance.

The fountain of true joy is, of course, not in visible

reality. It is Jesus himself. When Jesus came down to this earth 2000 years ago, the Holy Angels said, "Stop being afraid! Listen! I am bringing you good news of great new strength for all the people. Your Savior, the Lord Messiah, is born."

Without never-changing joy, our life will be heavy and depressing. Without never-changing joy, our life will be so boring. The wonderful joy provided through the Bible that consists of the words of the Lord is far more important than mere pleasure, delight, relish or temporary relief from your problems.

The wonderful joy that is provided through the Bible makes us feel everlasting happiness from the bottom of our hearts. It dissolves our worries and agonies. It leads us to perfect peace and strengthens our conviction that we are completely protected in the hands of the Father God.

"Mary will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he is the one who will save his people from their sins." What is absolutely necessary for all humans is to obtain forgiveness for their sins.

Because it is not until our sins are forgiven that fellowship with the Lord God is allowed. And men can be satisfied and fulfilled by nothing but fellowship with the Father God. The foundation of joy that no one can deprive us of is in forgiveness of sins. Sin is a barrier that separates humans from the true God.

However, by the sacrifice of Jesus, by the death of the Lord Jesus, the wall that divided humans and God was torn down. Without the one who sacrificed himself, without the death of this innocent man, there would have been no way of salvation, so states the Bible clearly.

When Jesus died on the cross, he died for each one of us. That is to say, the death of Jesus was the punishment and judgment for sins of humans. When all sins were punished by the death of Jesus, then the sacred Lord God could forgive our sins.

After all, if we humble ourselves, all will be well. It is written that if our sin is confessed, it is not just forgiven, but will be forgotten forever. Those who believe in the promise of the Lord will be saved. Consequently, their sins will be forgiven, and they will be granted the peace of God and eternal life. And this exactly is the source of true joy that can be deprived by nobody.

Everlasting joy can be found not in ourselves, not in our possessions or circumstances, but in Jesus himself alone. The fact that we are allowed to be

connected to Jesus is itself true joy. All other kinds of joy are insignificant and meaningless. These are just temporal and won't last forever.

"Always be joyful." This is the command of the Lord to us. This is exactly the intention of the Lord and what the Lord wants from us. Sorrow, disappointment or a sense of defeat are not allowed anymore. The Lord strictly tells us that we ought to remain joyful. It is sin, after all, to show a disobedient attitude against this command of the Lord.

Secondly, we are supposed to continually be prayerful. It is most important for us to pray. The life of those who refuse to pray is so miserable and pitiful. Those who don't pray have no joy, bear no fruit and are not used by the Lord.

Why are so many people devastated? It is because they barely pray, or hardly seek help at all. Why are they defeated all the time? It is because they seldom or never pray or their prayer is not enough, isn't it? Why are only a few people brought into light from darkness? It is because they seldom pray, or they pray too little, isn't it?

He is the one who can do anything and is almighty. Just like he used to, he still wholeheartedly desires to save men. That is to say, the Lord's hand is not too short to save.

I guess that all worries arise because of insufficient prayers in our life. With prayers, we can benefit from the strength of the Lord Almighty. That is to say, when we pray, the Lord Almighty performs his miracles. It is always sincere prayers that help their fruits to last.

What is the purpose of our life? It should be neither knowledge nor honour, but an eternal fruit. And a branch bears fruit only when it is connected to the vine, which is Jesus. If we are not connected with Jesus and if we don't strive to live a life of prayers, we won't bear fruits that will last long.

"Continually be prayerful." This is what the Lord wants from us. Let us accept the grace of the Lord and become people of prayers. Then, we will change. Our family members, friends and other people we know will change too.

To continually be prayerful, we need to avoid self-centered behavior, and instead to rely on the Lord. Relying on the Lord is a wonderful privilege given to us. Whether we pray or not is not trivial for us. It is a command from the Lord to be continually prayerful. And, it is a sin not to obey his command. It is a barrier that divides.

Finally, the third point is to be thankful in everything. If we are told to “rejoice once in a while” or to “rejoice on every Sunday”, it may be somewhat understandable. But the Lord's command to us is to always be joyful.

If we are required to “pray occasionally at least every morning and night”, we will all be willing to do so. But the Lord is telling us to “continually be prayerful.”

Now, if we are told to be thankful to something specific, it is easy for anyone to agree and say “okay, okay, I am thankful to it.” However, the Lord commands us to be thankful in everything.

It says 'everything.' Through everything, we should strive to understand Jesus better. Understanding Jesus better is more valuable than anything else. So, let us never forget to sincerely appreciate all things in life.

Is it possible to continually be prayerful and always be joyful? If someone believes that they can easily be continually prayerful by themselves and it is so simple for them to be thankful in everything, they are so pitiful. It is absolutely impossible for them.

Jesus clearly said, “apart from me you can do nothing.” Apart from Jesus, we can neither have indefeasible joy, nor continually be prayerful, nor be thankful in everything.

You all know the famous chapter 15 of John very well. Let us see how Jesus is described in this John 15; “Jesus himself is the true vine and we are the branches.” Branches bear a lot of fruit when the trunk of the tree provides strength to them. The trunk of the vine is filled with strength and life.

And Jesus has promised, “The one who abides in me while I abide in him produces much fruit.” Apart from Jesus, we are not able to believe, pray, repent, love or thank in the true sense. It is not possible at all. This is exactly what Jesus said and Jesus never exaggerates when he speaks.

Shouldn't we confess now? Although we understand very well what the Lord wants from us, it is not just difficult, but impossible to follow it. It is unachievable. So, why don't we rely on the one who can do anything? Because we are all so miserable and poor, we rely on the Lord Almighty.

To rely on the Lord, to depend on the Lord is, after all, to be connected to the fountain. What we are supposed to learn through our life of faith is the same as what Peter had to go through. The Lord said to him;

John

21:18 Truly, I tell you emphatically, when you were young, you would fasten your belt and go wherever you liked. But when you get old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten your belt and take you where you don't want to go.

Total reliance on the Lord is the secret to bear fruit and to lead a life of faith filled with blessings.

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