

**Sermon Notes of
Pastor Craig Kuhlman's Sermon on December 17, 2017**

**"Transformed Living: Rejoice Always
(1 Thessalonians 5:16-24)"**

Third Sunday of Advent – Joy

[In today's sermon (Third Sunday of Advent), "Transformed Living: Rejoice Always (1 Thessalonians 5:16-24)", Pastor Craig Kuhlman shows that when a person is guided by the Holy Spirit, they will rejoice in both positive and negative situations.]

Notes

Introduction:

- Today's Advent theme: anticipate and rejoice
- So the word "joy" is the noun and "rejoice" is the verb.
- Rejoicing is not always easy to do, especially if you spent the week with a fever, or you spent the week in the hospital or you spent the week worrying about things.
- But it was because Jesus came and that He is coming again that we have every reason to rejoice.

- Now as we've been going through this "transformed life series" we're coming to see that in God's economy, everything thing that we anticipate or think on our own is somehow flipped on its head.
- And so, when we think of the concept of rejoice, we realize that there are many things in this life that could prevent us from rejoicing.
- But we find in Scripture that rejoicing, being happy is always, always, always in the context of being in negative situations.

- For example, Paul found himself in prison and yet he said those were times of joy.
- As we sung this morning – Christ on the cross somehow managed to find joy in that.
- So, this morning we're going to continue our "transformed living" theme taking it from the passage from 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 (NASB).

1 Thessalonians 5:16, Rejoice always;

- So let's sit back and reflect upon that concept.
- It's easy to dwell on the negative because that's sometimes how we are wired.
- But, yet for the believer who knows who they are through the Incarnation, we look at it differently than we normally would.
- Notice Paul didn't say "rejoice only when you get that bonus, rejoice only when you are feeling great, rejoice only when your kids are behaving well or rejoice only when the stock market is doing great."
- No, Paul wants us to rejoice continually no matter what situation we find ourselves in.

- Now the Jewish culture, at that time, had a belief of who the Messiah would be, how He would come, what He would do and accomplish – but it didn't turn out that way at all.

- Jesus, the King, came to a less than wealthy family, born on a pile of straw – in other words Jesus came here in circumstances that were not befitting a Messiah.
- And everything in His life, from His birth forward, was upside down to what people thought would have happened.

- So when Paul talks about living the transformed life, shouldn't it also be opposite to whatever we might humanly think or imagine?
- We are told through Scripture to always rejoice in the negative and the positive aspects of life.

- Now, the church at Thessalonica was a very new church and only had been established two or three years before this letter was written.
- And they were primarily a Greek church – so it was a Gentile church.
- Paul had established the church, but had gone away and now was sending Timothy to strengthen them since they were a new body of believers.

- The word “rejoice” is translated from the Greek word “chairō” means “to be cheerful, calmly happy or well-off.
- So the question for today is: can we always be cheerful or calmly happy, can we always feel well-off?
- Now, if we just measure ourselves by physical things, the answer is that we're probably going to come up short.

- But when we measure ourselves by who we are in the Father, Son and Spirit then there's always room and reason to be cheerful, to be calmly happy and to be well-off.
- That's because we know that the Father, Son and Spirit has embraced us.
- Being joyful isn't always easy, but it's simple because we know whose we are.

- Now in these next verses, we find 7 imperatives that a believer should maintain.
 - The first 3 are about the inward life and who we are as individuals.
 - The last 4 speak to the corporate setting of the church itself.
 - And it also gives us a clue as to how we can always rejoice.
 - Always rejoicing is an outcome, it's a result that comes in a supernatural way, but not necessarily automatically.
 - There are things we can do as believers in response to the promptings of God.

17) pray without ceasing;

- We are encouraged to do this – reaching out to God in conversation.
- It doesn't mean that we spend every moment of our life in prayer, but rather we are constantly in that worshipful mode.
- And when circumstances and situations come up, we can say those prayers and engage the Father, Son and Spirit right there at the moment.
- These moments can be at work, at school or out on the freeway, etc.

18) in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

- Now these three things, “Rejoice always”, “pray without ceasing”, and “in everything give thanks” come as an outflow and a result of the faith that we have.

- These things could not come about, if the Incarnation hadn't happened.
- Love, joy and peace are associated with the Incarnation that Jesus came here to live His life here on earth and to include all of us in His birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension.
- So doing these three things, rejoicing, praying and giving thanks, is "God's will for us."
- It's not our doing – so don't think, "I've got to do more of these things."
- But accomplishing these things comes through faith and belief by acknowledging that through the Father, Son and Spirit, we want to yield and surrender ourselves to God.
- As we yield ourselves to the life that doesn't come naturally to us, then those things begin to happen.
- So to have more joy in our lives, to have more peace in our lives, doesn't come by what we do, but by realizing who we are and who does those things through us.
- And as we let the Spirit flow through us, the fruits of the Spirit begin to grow.
- So, rather than trying to find peace in a bottle, we find peace in our Creator. We find joy in our Creator.

19) Do not quench the Spirit;

- This essentially means, don't let the flames of fire of the Spirit go out or let them diminish in your life.
- So, by not quenching the Spirit simply means be yielded to what the Holy Spirit does – it means keeping ourselves on that path of transformation through conversation (prayer), curiosity (studying the Scriptures), and contemplation (meditation) and acknowledging that Jesus is our source.
- Now the moment we think that there is something for us to do instead of yielding to the fruits of the Spirit, we have messed it up completely.
- Anything we do humanly to achieve a spiritual outcome, doesn't work in God's economy.
- But what does work is yielding to Jesus who is in us and living out the life God brought us to – that's how transformation comes.

20) do not despise prophetic utterances.

- This is inspired speaking and preaching.
- So, Paul was telling the Thessalonians to be and to live as:
 - A Happy Church
 - A Praying Church
 - A Thankful Church

21) But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; 22) abstain from every form of evil. 23) Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Paul has shown us, that at the cross, Jesus transferred His righteousness for our sinfulness.

- And that Jesus, through His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, we are now seen and viewed through the Father's eyes, as righteous, because Jesus is righteous.
- Now the "but yet" is that we don't always feel that way.
- But, it doesn't matter how we feel but rather who we are – what matters is the fact that Jesus came to live His life so He could include all of us and declare us as righteous.
- This is what matters. This is what's true!
- So, since that's who we are, let's live that way, Paul is telling us.
- And when we live that way, we experience the hope, the joy, and the peace that comes from this season.
- Now we know that as long as we maintain our physical bodies, we're not going to always be the most representative of the fruits of the Spirit.
- But yet, God is taking us through this transformation and sanctification process through the Holy spirit in such a way that we are being changed daily, being renewed daily, being sanctified and transformed into the very character of Jesus Christ who lives in us.

24) Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.

- So, it's not something we have to worry about if we fall short.
- Because of our relationship with God, there is no room for fear, shame, guilt or doubt.
- God is faithful and He will bring about our transformation and change.
- So when we fall short, we just need to get back up and allow God's Spirit to continue to work with us to change us.
- These things will continue on until we reach the final stage of glorification.
- Amen! Absolutely!
- So, we need to remain yielded to God, to remain humble, to remain on the path of grace and to continue developing that relationship God has with us.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 (Mirror)

16) Be cheerfully happy at all times! 17) Constantly engage your thoughts in worshipful prayer. 18) Your gratitude is not based on anything fragile or fading, but secured in the fact that God's purpose for you was concluded in Christ Jesus.

- Did we hear that – "God's purpose for you was concluded in Christ Jesus"?
- The source of all joy, the source of rejoicing was concluded in Jesus.
- And, we, as believers, have that; and we, as believers, want to share that with not-yet-believers.
- Everyone can have that relationship that they were created for.

19) Do not suffocate the flame of the Spirit within you.

- We need to pray to God and ask, "Help me get out of the way and let Your Spirit flow through me."
- Paul is telling the Thessalonians and us today "to flame on" and to not let ourselves get in the way and quench the work of the Holy Spirit.
- We don't "flame on" but rather we let the Spirit "flame on."

20) The prophetic word is not to be underestimated. 21) Test everything like one would test gold to determine its true value, then treasure that which is precious with great care. 22) Distance yourselves immediately from every practice remotely related to the fruit of the “I-am-not-tree,” which is the typical exhausting law of works system.

- So when we think that we’ve got to do something on our own, because of some performance based system, we’re mistaken because, spiritually speaking, it just doesn’t work that way.
- When we try to do spiritual things on our own, we’re living out of the “I-am-not-tree.”
- What we do is to let Jesus do it; we let the Spirit flow through us.
- We let God’s purpose become our purpose.

23) There, away from any effort of your own, discover how the God of perfect peace, who fused you skillfully into oneness – just like a master craftsman would dovetail a carpentry joint – has personally perfected and sanctified the entire harmony of your being without your help!

- Do we understand that God has “sanctified the entire harmony of our being without our help”?
- It’s the Father, Son and Spirit who is doing it for us.
- And sometimes when we get in the way, He nudges us out of the way.
- But God doesn’t ever force us, but that doesn’t mean He ever stops loving us.
- Now we have a part to play – it’s our participation, our response.

23b) He has restored the detailed default settings. You were re-booted to fully participate in the life of your design, in your spirit, soul and body in blameless innocence in in the immediate presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24) You are defined by the faith of God; you are his poetry!

Conclusion:

- Can we just sit back and bask in that for a moment?
- Each and every one of us is God’s poetry.
- So let’s rejoice always, rejoice always.

Communion message given by elder James Roberts:

- This is a true story written by Charity Singleton Craig (In Touch Magazine) called “This Is My Body.” Subtitled: “Communion is about our intimacy with God and with each other.”
 - Recently, my husband and I attended church with my dad and stepmom when we were visiting them.
 - Toward the end of service, the pastor invited the congregation to take Communion.
 - But we also noticed that Rick, the elderly man we’d met just before service, wasn’t going forward.
 - When Dad returned to his seat, he whispered to me, “See if Rick wants me to bring the elements to him.”

- This time I recognized that Rick probably wasn't in the greatest of health – he struggled to get up and down from his chair.
- I whispered loudly in his ear: "Do you want to take Communion? My dad could bring it back here," I said. Rick nodded, and I gave Dad the thumbs up. "
- Leaning over two rows of chairs, Dad handed me the plate of small wafers.
- I held it out to Rick, but when he tried to grab one, the tremor in his hand caused it to fall.

- So I pinched a second wafer between my thumb and forefinger and held it out to him and whispered, "The body of Christ broken for you."
- He eventually latched on to it, and with his other hand, grabbed his wrist to help guide it to his mouth.
- Tears welled up in my eyes. I thought, "He's never going to be able to take the juice."
- So, instead of grabbing the whole tray of tiny cups, I took just one.

- Without a word between us, I turned to face Rick and lifted the tiny cup to his mouth.
- "The blood of Christ, shed for you," I said, raising the cup higher as he leaned his head back.
- When the cup was empty, I drew it away from his face and set it down on the floor.
- "My wife used to do that for me, but she died a couple of months ago," he whispered.
- Tears ran down both our faces. We hugged tightly, strangers who had never laid eyes on each other before, but somehow united as members of one body.

- It should have felt awkward, entering into such an intimate moment with a stranger.

- But Paul says when we break the bread and drink the wine of Communion, we are participating in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16).
- And in that moment, though I would never be able to explain how, it no longer felt as if Rick and I were two separate people sharing in a ceremony but more like a hand simply moving the cup to a mouth on the same body.
- Before the tears could stop, Rick raised his shaking hands in the air and began singing again: "Not for a moment did You forsake me."
- As the service ended, I realized how full I was.

- Comments by Jim Roberts
 - Yes, she was full of Jesus and she was also full of joy.
 - This woman, Charity Singleton, lived up to her first name which means "love."
 - As for her last name, she learned profoundly that she was not a Singleton in the Body of Christ.
 - She experienced the joy of sharing with another, with whom she had no prior physical connection.

 - She got the point of the charity that the Holy Triune God expressed to us in the sacrificial act of giving the Body and Blood of Christ for us.

- May we be thankful to God for this gift and appreciate getting to share it with our fellow brethren.
 - Though intensely personal, this symbolic act is also intensely reflective of our common unity seen in the word Communion.
 - This completes our joy in our participation in the Lord's Table.
- People came forward to take the bread and cup back to their seats so everyone would be able to take Communion together.
 - Once everyone returned to their seats, Communion prayer was offered.