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Sermon Meta Information

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Sermon

Introduction.

Boaz prayed that Ruth would find refuge under the wings of the Lord God of Israel. Under the wings of the Lord is a place of security, rest, restoration, comfort, provision, gladness and rejoicing because the Lord himself is the ultimate loving provider and protector. Anyone who thought about Ruth's situation as a destitute grieving non-kosher widow living in Bethlehem with Naomi, would have known that her great need was to find refuge under the wings of the Lord. If Ruth was filled with anxiety and had a sense of gloom we would not be surprised. All of us have known and experienced the *tyranny of circumstances*. The tyranny of circumstance is a real enemy of the Christian life as it robs believers of their peace and joy in the Lord. When you are caught up in the tyranny of circumstances you feel sad, unhappy, unmotivated, useless, frustrated, uncertain, fearful, and your mind replays the worst case scenario over and over again. Your heavy heart groans under the weight of potential problems and a sense of emptiness. You do not sleep at night and during the day you plod along too tired to do anything and you simply want to be left alone to sit and wallow in self pity. The tyranny of circumstance first produces anxiety and then depression. It is very important to note that the opposite of anxiety is not to be worry-free, laid-back, easy going, and certainly not irresponsible, but having peace in your heart and mind. The tyranny of circumstance destroys your peace and makes you feel like a wild category 5 cyclone has hit you. If as a Christian you are to overcome anxiety you need to have your peace in the Lord restored. To abide under the wings of the Lord is to live in peace, perfect peace. Restoration of peace through prayer is at the very heart of Paul's teaching in **Philippians 4:4-9**. Paul in this passage is teaching the Christians in Philippi how to *find real refuge under the wings of the Lord*. This is a subject that every believer needs to understand thoroughly and constantly apply to their lives. Doing what Paul instructs here is the way you must maintain your peace in the Lord. The things he sets out in **Philippians 4:4-9** ought to be part of your daily spiritual duty. The process he sets out must be the routine you follow everyday. Listen to what Paul says:

'Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all

understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy-meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.'

Paul instructs believers on how to regain and maintain the peace of the Lord in their hearts and minds. The four exercises he gives can be stated as follows:

- 1. Keep your faith, trust and love focused.**
- 2. Keep your actions God-centred.**
- 3. Keep your prayer life alive.**
- 4. Keep the wonder of the peace of God.**

We need to constantly do these four things in order to abide or keep ourselves under the wings of the Lord. This morning we will look at **Keeping your faith, trust and love focused on the Lord.**

1. Keeping your faith, trust and love focused on the Lord.

- a. Can you imagine living in a world where everything is out of focus and you can't really make sense of what you see? Living like this would be very restrictive and frustrating. Many believers live without having their faith, trust and love focussed on the Lord and therefore their spiritual sight is blurred and their peace in the Lord is easily disrupted. Our focus must be on the Lord himself as our faith, trust and love are responses to who he is. How are you as a believer to make the Lord himself your focus? Paul's answer is; *Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!* This is a commanded duty and not to do it is sinful. The most common objection to this command is, *'Rejoicing involves the feelings of my heart so how can I rejoice if I do not feel like rejoicing?'* This is an important question because it raises real issues about how my feelings affect my relationship with the Lord. *The first principle that we need to fix in our hearts and minds is: **Our feelings must never dominate or rule us.*** God in his wisdom created us with feelings. As saved sinners some of our feelings are God glorifying while others dishonour him. Our feelings need to be sanctified so that they are controlled by the will of God and not by the desires of our emotions. If we lived according to our feelings, our lives would be in absolute chaos, and we would find it impossible to live with one another. God has given you feelings, but not to have them rule over you. If your faith, trust and love are not focussed on the Lord you will be lured into living according to your feelings. All Christians have mixed feelings; some that glorify God and some that lead to sin. The devil and the remnants of sin that continue to be active in us want us to live according to feelings because living according to feelings even those feelings that glorify God keep us unstable in our Christian walk. The devil is happy to deceive believers into thinking that they can live according to their feelings that glorify God and fight against feelings that lead to sin because it means that they are unstable and sabotage their growth in holiness and grace. Christians must be governed by the will of God and not by their feelings, even those feelings that glorify God.
- b. The *second principle which we need to imprint on our hearts and minds is; **'Our lack of feelings in spiritual things must never stop us from rejoicing in the Lord.'*** There are two very important points concerning this temptation that need to be noted.
 - i. It is very easy to be tempted by the argument that says, *'God hates mechanical rejoicing therefore wait for your feelings to change before you rejoice in the Lord.'* Would you apply this same reasoning to the command to repent of your sins? Will you keep on sinning until you feel like repenting? This reasoning is simply another way of getting us to submit to our feelings. Listen to **Jay Adams** on this matter, *'fundamentally, the problem of the first sin amount to this: Adam and Eve opted for the satisfaction of desire rather than for obedience to the command of God. The devil appealed to the lusts of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life' (cf 1 John 2:16 with Genesis 3:6). Over against this was the command of God: 'You shall not eat.'* *The options given them were the same options that one faces now. They reflect two distinct moralities, two antithetical religions, and two discrete manners of life. The*

one says: 'I shall live according to my feelings' the other: 'I shall live as God says.' --- 'When Adam sinned he was abandoning the commandment orientated life of love for the feeling orientated life of lust.' Obedience to the command to rejoice is better done without the right feelings than not done at all. Rejoicing without the appropriate feelings shows a command orientated life that leads to holiness rather than feelings orientated life that leads to sin.

- ii. It is easy to be tempted by the argument that says, *'Praying or reading the Bible without spiritual feelings indicates that the Lord no longer loves you therefore you can't rejoice.'* Do not yield to the argument that says, *you cannot rejoice unless you feel God loves you.* The great flaw in this argument comes from the fact that feelings do not change facts. Almighty God has proclaimed his eternal covenant love to all believers, for God to stop loving you would require him to break his covenant. God cannot break his covenant; if he did he would cease to be God. Knowing that God's love is a covenantal love Paul in **Romans 8:38-39** says, *'I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'* Your feelings do not change or affect God's love for you, therefore rejoice in the Lord.
- c. What is the spiritual exercise of rejoicing? According to the dictionaries I consulted rejoicing is usually a response to good news. On May 8th 1945 news of the unconditional surrender of German forces broke in the West and Europe rejoiced. Beaconsfield and Australia rejoiced when the news broke that Todd Russel and Brant Webb had been rescued. If the team you play for wins the game, you rejoice in your victory. If we succeed in anything, we rejoice. Because rejoicing is so event orientated it is easy to see why it is strongly linked to feelings. Event orientated rejoicing also firmly links rejoicing to good or favourable circumstances. There is a place and time for believers to rejoice in the providences of God that brings victory, success and blessings to them. Should not husband and wife rejoice when their first child is born? Should believing fathers and mothers not rejoice when their children profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? God's people however do not only rejoice in response to events that make them glad, they also rejoice in the Lord. Rejoicing in the Lord is not essentially linked to circumstance as believers are to rejoice always, which includes adverse, grim, difficult and stressful circumstances.
- d. The Lord's people rejoice simply because they belong to the Lord. Christians rejoice because they are united to Christ, and it is his joy that grips the inner being of his people. We need to remember that Paul was in a Roman prison with his execution awaiting the decision of Caesar when he wrote the epistle to the church at Philippi. While in prison Paul preached to a captive audience and tells the Philippians, *Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.* Paul's position was much worse than anyone in Philippi yet he did not stop *rejoicing in the Lord.* When it comes to obeying the command *always rejoice*, Paul led by example. Christians focus on the Lord because he is the source of their joy. ***The primary object of the Christians joy is the Lord, not their circumstances.*** The exercise of Biblical rejoicing is to think about God and to respond to whom he is and what he has done for you and in you and remind yourself that these things are unshakable facts. The best way of explaining the Christian exercise of rejoicing in the Lord is to look at some examples of it in the Word. Listen to David rejoicing in **Psalm 18:1-3**, *'I will love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies.* There can be no doubt that David is focused on the Lord. What were David's circumstances? Listen to **verses 4-5**, *'The pangs of death surrounded me, and the floods of ungodliness made me afraid. The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me.'* These verses related very grim circumstances. The object of David's joy was the Lord and not his circumstances. After Job hears the news that his children have been killed and that most of his wealth has been lost he says; *"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord"* **Job 1:21**. Job's focus is on the Lord and his absolute sovereignty. In contrast listen to Naomi, *"Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord has*

brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?" (**Ruth 1:20-21**) Naomi's focus is on herself and her sad circumstances and not the Lord therefore she has no joy. *Focussing on the Lord as your object of joy is the **first rule** of rejoicing in the Lord.*

- e. The **second rule** of rejoicing is to focus on God's actions. We need to focus on God's actions because it is through those actions that God's character is revealed. God will never act in a way that contradicts his character. To rejoice in the actions of God you need to personalise the deeds of God. Listen to part of a puritan prayer rejoicing in the actions of God;

*'O Father, you have loved me and sent Jesus to redeem me:
O Jesus, you loved me and assumed my nature, shed your own blood to wash away my sin; wrought righteousness to cover my unworthiness.
O Holy Spirit, you loved me and entered my heart, there implanted eternal life, and revealed the glories of Jesus to me.
Three persons and one God, I bless and praise you for love so unmerited, so unspeakable, so wondrous, so mighty to save the lost and raise them to glory.'*

- f. When you think about what God has done for you and to you it should warm your heart towards God and put praise and thanksgiving on your lips.
- g. The **third rule** of rejoicing in the Lord is to focus on what the Lord has already dealt with in your life. God has dealt with your past and fully forgiven your sin through the atonement made by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. He has declared you just and imputed Christ's righteousness to you. He has proclaimed that you will never be condemned to hell. He has reconciled you to himself dealing comprehensively with every obstacle that prevented reconciliation. He has made you a citizen of heaven and put his seal of ownership on you. He dwells with you, in you and will never leave you nor forsake you. God has made you his very own. These are things that have already happened and nothing can alter that fact.
- h. The **fourth rule** of rejoicing in the Lord is to look to the future with confidence. Concerning the future you can be absolute certain of every promise God has made. As a Christian you can be confident that *He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6)* You can be sure that God will always be your Father, Christ Jesus will always be your Saviour and the Holy Spirit will always be your Helper. Like Ruth you may well be thinking of your material needs and health because these are pressing issues. When Jesus spoke about our daily needs in the Sermon on the Mount did he not say, *'seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you'*? When you focus on the Lord and think about his promises you cannot but say with David, *'The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need.'* The Lord who is my shepherd today will also be my shepherd in all my tomorrows, I will always be in his fold loved and kept by the might of his power.
- i. The exercise of rejoicing in the Lord focuses your faith, trust and love on the Lord and fills your heart and minds with the wonder of belonging to God. *Your faith* is refocussed by affirming that you believe God. You believe him and all he has said in his word. *Your trust* has been refocussed by reviewing what God has already done for you and in you and what he has promised about your future. *Your love* for him has been refocussed by recognising his covenantal love for you. Listen to what **1 John 4:10** says, *'In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.'* The truth that you are a saved sinner greatly loved by God ought to fill you with wonder. The exercise of rejoicing in the Lord is given to you to do everyday so that your faith, trust and love for the Lord remains focussed primarily on him and not on your circumstances. This does not mean that you push out the realities of your circumstances by not thinking about them. This is not occupying your mind so that you do not think about your problems, it's bringing your circumstance under the perspective that your God is in control of your life and circumstances. You are not a victim of circumstances you are a child in the hands of a loving Father who counts you as exceedingly precious.

Conclusion.

This is the spiritual exercise of rejoicing that we should practise every day. We should start each day with the words of **Psalm 118:24** *'This is the day the Lord has made we will rejoice and be glad in it.'* If you are seeking to restore the peace of God in your heart *rejoice in the Lord* everyday and ask the Lord to give you the peace that surpasses all understanding. Plead with the Father to restore you to a command-oriented life and give you grace to leave your feelings oriented life behind you. Ask the Lord Jesus to give you a deeper understanding of his love for you so that your love will not be cold. Petition the Holy Spirit to sanctify your feelings and bring them into line with the fruit of the Spirit, *love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.* I challenge you to make rejoicing in the Lord your daily practise and rediscover the peace of being a child of God. May God give us grace to obey this command.