

CHOOSE JOY

-Ryan Parsons-

I don't know about you, but I am thankful for the people who have traveled the road before me. Anyone who can notice the potholes and steer me away from the dangers is greatly appreciated. That is why I am thankful to have the accounts of the very first Christians. Their faith conversations, recorded for us in the inspired Word of God, are a huge bonus for us as we live our lives. Understanding their challenges and the prescribed way to handle them is pure gold. Realizing that our lives today are not much different than theirs empowers us to gain encouragement and direction for our path.

Paul writes the Philippian letter to a group of Christians who are in danger of losing a stable spiritual attitude and adopting the doom and gloom attitude with its precipitating behaviors. In his concluding remarks (Philippians 4:1ff), Paul prescribes a good dose of medicine to prevent the corruption of their attitudes.

Let me tell you why this hits so close to home for me. I'm not sure why, but I was raised on a relatively large dose of negativity. There was always something wrong with everything, and if there wasn't, you just hadn't looked hard enough. It took me many years to actually understand this about my past and how it had affected my attitude. I wouldn't call it a gift, but I had a knack for looking at a situation and ignoring any silver lining. My attitude was far from positive and erred on the side of anger, negativity, and gloom. As you can imagine, it didn't work out well for me. I had to learn the hard way. That sort of mindset affects education, work, and relationships. More than anything, it affects your spiritual life. It clouds your vision and dampens your ability to see God at work.

Believe it or not, Paul says to the Philippian church, *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice* (Phil. 4:4). Why, you might ask, did the church need to hear that? Basically, between the pressures of living in a hostile world and tensions within the church, the Christians there were in danger of succumbing to the doom and gloom attitude and allowing it to skew their perspective of God.

I'm not sure I would want to hear "Choose Joy!" when things around me are going south. But, it was exactly what they needed. This isn't "Slap a smile on and gut it out!" It is **Joy in the Lord**. It is remembering that, regardless of what is going on in the world around us, the Lord, Creator, Savior and King is in control. Moreover, he has taken care of sin once and for all by his own blood (Ro. 5:6-11, Eph. 2:12-14). Remembering that will do more than paste a smile on your face; it will transform the most ho-hum attitude into a spirit driven by joy. That joy is precisely the strength we need to continue (Nehemiah 8:10b).

Take some time this week to turn off the world's noise and forget the doom and gloom that our world broadcasts in epic proportions. Remember the *only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords* (1 Tim. 6:15), and choose joy.