

## **Rejoice in the Lord**

Sermon October 23, 2022

**Scriptures:** Isaiah 61:1-11 and Acts 16:23-34

**Golden Verse:** *“I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God.”*

- Isaiah 61:10/a

Today, I want to talk about how a person’s life can become abundant through Jesus Christ.

Jesus was once asked why He, as God, left heaven and came down to this world as a man. Jesus answered: *“I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly”* John 10:10. I would like to draw your attention to the single word “abundantly”.

The meaning of the original word abound is: to have something in abundance, to be very rich in something, to have something in an overflowing way. For those who trust in Him, our Lord Jesus Christ means such an abundant life, spiritually and materially. This person is so full of joy, love and grace that he not only has enough of everything for himself in every situation, at all times, but also gives it to others. He can make others happy with it.

It is truly a great privilege to live with Jesus. I have thought about this many times, and I want you to feel something about it: how good it is for us that we can believe in Jesus, our Lord Jesus who completes our lives so much.

If we were to take what He says quite seriously, we would be filled with endless joy. Our joy would overflow our hearts and people around us would benefit from our joy. We would be able to share our joy with our spouses, our children, and even with our enemies. This happiness, this inner joy, which we are talking about here, would radiate from us at all times and everywhere.

The other day, I became very sad when a young person said that he would never enter a church. It seems that he was brought up in such a way that his parents never took him to church, near God. Now the bigger problem is that he, a 25-year-old person, doesn’t even think about what the essence of the church is or what God wants with his life.

Christ is not to be feared. He doesn’t want to take, but He wants to give. Jesus does not want to make anyone poor; He wants to enrich everyone’s life with joy. He wants to give true joy, which no one can give but Jesus.

When people do not want to hear about Jesus, they don't really know how much joy and happiness they are refusing, and what they could receive for free.

Once, a person said that he decided to follow Jesus when he heard that Jesus gives joy and happiness for free. His love is for free. His grace is for free. His gifts are for free.

The Christian life is a very happy and joyful life, but unfortunately this is often not visible on us. We look rather sad, as if we were walking in a funeral procession. Even when we take communion, we look like something sad is happening here. It's a victory dinner. It means that we can already enjoy the full victory of Jesus to come. Our sadness is not attractive to people, and therefore they do not envy us, because we do not appear to abound in joy. The Christian life is therefore a very abundant life, a joyful life.

Once, a minister came from Africa to preach in Europe, and he was shocked to see the tense seriousness with which the members sat in the pews, rigidly listening to the sermon about joy. No matter how uplifting the message was, no one smiled. No matter how gratifying he spoke, his joy did not rub off on anyone. When he continued to talk about God's love, gifts, and everyday blessings in a more powerful way, he didn't see anything reflected on the faces of the joy he was talking about. That's why he stopped his preaching at one point and asked if there was a coffin inside the church, because everyone was watching as joylessly as if they were at the funeral of a young person who died suddenly and tragically.

Then he said, what we often see on TV, that in his congregation when people hear the good news, that God is good, He loves us, He is here bringing us safety, love and joy, people are smiling, and rejoicing and clapping, being filled with happiness.

Everything we know about Jesus, what He did, how He lived, died and rose again, can all be summed up in one word, this word: gospel, which means good news. Such divine good news makes our heart to rejoice.

Human good news can also have a good effect on our mood: it revives a person even in bitterness, and a person almost gets new spiritual strength from really good news. Well, try to imagine what the divine good news could make in us and through us if we would really accept it and share it.

Being happy is a good thing. Everyone loves or wants to be happy. And joy is not only a good thing, but necessary. All people need joy as much as plants, animals or people need sunlight. Joy is the sunshine of life.

When some flowers have to be brought in and we put them in the basement, their leaves turn yellow and fall off because they don't get life-giving sunlight.

I also know that it is not easy for us adults to always be happy.

Let us remember those moments, when our children were young. How often we went quietly into their bedrooms to watch them and to see if they were sleeping. And there were moments when they were awake, and were playing either with their own fingers or with some toys, or they were just looking around. But when they saw us standing next to their crib watching them, their hearts filled with joy and we saw that big amazing smile on their faces. Many times, they extended their hands, asking us to pick them up and to hold them close to our hearts.

How happy the children are. A healthy joie de vivre is just straining in them. They can enjoy everything; they can enjoy life.

Thank God, there is such joy! The Gospel of Christ proclaims just this kind of joy, and the apostle Paul also encourages us, saying: "*Rejoice in the Lord at all times, I say again, rejoice!*" Philippians 4:4

There is a great message in this. Let me try to clarify with an example. We heard that Paul and Silas glorified God with songs at midnight. What a terrible midnight it was. Those two men were laying in blood on the pavement of the prison, because when the Roman soldiers inflicted fifty lashes on someone - and they were sentenced to that - then there wasn't a palm-sized amount of intact skin left on that body. They were in the innermost prison, and their feet were shackled. They couldn't even move in that small space. These two people did not sing praises to God when they were already out of prison, their hearts did not rejoice when everything was in order again and lighted up around them, but at midnight, when they were in pain and trouble. When their wounds ached, when they leaned against the damp walls of the prison with their bleeding backs, and the iron strap of the sword cut sharply into their living flesh, so when humanly their situation was the most bleak. After all, they had to appear in court the next day, and it threatened the worst prospect. They had no reason to rejoice and glorify God. But these two men glorified God. They felt like singing, they could rejoice there, in that terrible situation.

This shows that the joy that the Apostle Paul speaks of and that the Gospel preaches is something completely independent of prison, wounds, misery and hopelessness.

When everything is going well, when people have everything their eyes and mouth want, it is really not a big thing to be happy in prosperity, in a fortunate situation. But to be happy in such darkness, in such a terrible midnight of life, in which Paul and Silas were - is a very special joy.

What was the secret of this special joy? The secret is this little word: "in the Lord". "*Rejoice in the Lord at all times.*" What does "in the Lord" mean? We could very simply say that to be in the arms of God, in the loving arms of our heavenly Father.

Apart from the Lord, there is only such joy as eating, drinking, and being merry, because tomorrow we will die anyway. But joy in the Lord is such that: let's eat, drink, be merry, because we live forever. Amen